

THE INTERNATIONAL FILM MAGAZINE

Sight & Sound



INTERVIEW TOM HIDDLESTON ON BEN WHEATLEY'S

HIGH-RISE

PLUS

- J.G. BALLARD AND CINEMA ● THE DISRUPTIVE LIFE OF ALAN CLARKE ● 'THE WITCH'
- THE COENS' 'HAIL, CAESAR!' ● ONE-TAKE WONDER 'VICTORIA' ● PABLO LARRAIN'S 'THE CLUB'

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ROCCO AND HIS BROTHERS

a film by Luchino Visconti



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new films



carol
released 21/03/2016

film of the month



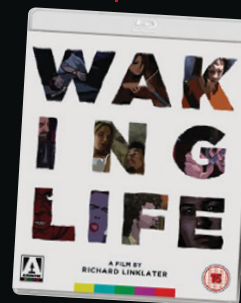
mississippi grind
released 07/03/2016



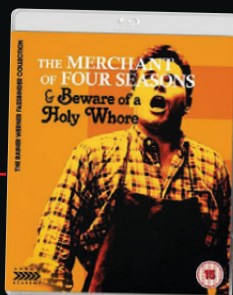
freeheld
out now



waking life
blu-ray
released 14/03/2016

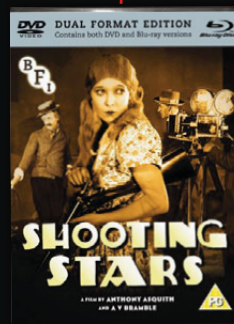


fear eats the soul
blu-ray
released 28/03/16



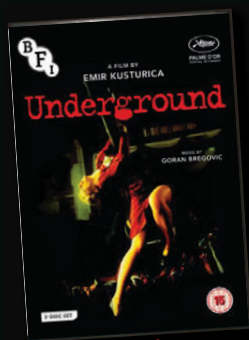
merchant of four seasons & beware of a holy whore
blu-ray
released 28/03/2016

shooting stars
dual format edition
released 21/03/2016



bande à part
blu-ray
released 21/03/2016

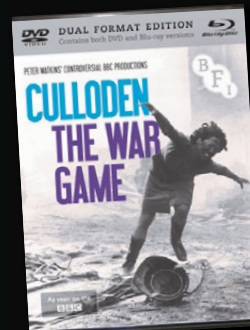
underground
also available on blu-ray
out now



valentino
dual format edition
out now



farewell my concubine
dual format edition
released 21/03/16



cullogen the war game
dual format edition
released 28/03/2016

**the
fopp
list**

the fopp list

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Editorial Nick James



STAMINA PARADISO

How do you persuade people to watch an eight-hour-plus film? In the case of the Berlinale International Jury I served on in February, we didn't need persuading – it was part of the deal. It wasn't even the elephant in the room, since everyone we met mentioned it all the time. It may even be the main reason why a critic experienced in watching long subtitled films was selected to be on this prestigious jury – a very rare occurrence at A-list festivals these days.

The film in question was Lav Diaz's *Lullaby to the Sorrowful Mystery*, and it was successful – our jury awarded it the Silver Bear Alfred Bauer prize for "a feature film that opens new perspectives". Diaz himself thanked the jury for its "endurance". The length of a film is, of course, partly dependent on the culture it comes from. Hollywood used to prefer 90 minutes, now 120 minutes. Bollywood films are routinely over 180 minutes. But why is watching long films regarded as something to be endured? Why this talk of marathons, as if it were a sport involving necessary pain to achieve a goal?

Whenever someone asks me how I can sit still for so long, I tend to say, "You've probably done it yourself," and we usually discover that the questioner has. If you've binge-watched, say, all five series of *The Wire*, then, arguably, you've watched a film drama that's approaching 60 hours in length – far more than an average working week – a fact that makes watching *Lullaby* seem a lightweight experience in comparison.

Purists will argue that watching *The Wire* in dribs and drabs at home is nothing like watching cinema, that only by seeing a film uninterrupted, in a well-attended auditorium does one give proper respect to the work. They're right to some extent – and Mark Cousins discusses this in his column this month (see page 12) – but I'm not so sure cinema always needs such reverence. An old-style intermission such as the one Tarantino built into his 70mm film print screenings of *The Hateful Eight*, can work either way. I found Tarantino's film (a mere three hours and seven minutes in 70mm), satisfying before the interval, but less so afterwards, whereas the one-hour break offered at our *Lullaby* screening was to me entirely refreshing to the film.

Experience in binge-watching box-sets may be why watching a long film – when you actually sit down, prepared to go the distance – no longer feels so daunting for many people. *Lullaby* is now the longest film I've seen in a single day, overtaking the more intense seven-and-a-half-hour experience of Béla Tarr's *Sátántangó*

Why is watching long films regarded as something to be endured? Why this talk of marathons, involving necessary pain to achieve a goal?



more than a dozen years ago, which I found frustrating because, while I loved it deeply, I lacked the energy to savour every moment as much as I wanted. The analogy with long-form TV drama works, I believe, because all long films tend to be episodic in structure. Jacques Rivette's near-13-hour *Out 1*, for instance – which, to my mild shame, I've yet to see – has eight distinct episodes, according to Tony Rayns ('Out in the open', Home Cinema, S&S, March).

What's curious about watching long films are the rhythms and rituals you develop. Self-consciousness is part of the package. Obviously, you need to concentrate when there's a lot happening, and can let the film wash over you when something more stately is going on. You'll find too that you can be more generally contemplative watching very long films, a very enriching feeling. Physically you'll want to make sure you don't get dehydrated or hungry, that your stomach doesn't audibly rumble or worse. It's difficult to choose the right moment to skip out to the loo, but a wide-shot crowd scene that seems like it wants to take its time might be good, even if you still run the risk of missing something. You can create your own stepping stones by checking the time every once in a while; you'll do it less frequently when the film has your full attention. All this becomes obvious once you're in the experience.

There is the question of whether extended length makes a film more memorable. I would say certain images remain in your mind for longer, something that partially compensates for the obvious time commitment required. When it comes to Diaz, there may be a difference between the phenomenon of seeing a Diaz film for the first time and seeing a second or third film by him, in that the initial experience constitutes an unusual cultural immersion, whereas any subsequent viewings will bring the critical faculties of comparison to bear.

"Look at him, he's like a trained athlete," mocked one of my fellow jurors gently at me as we went into the screening of *Lullaby*. But I'd say we can all do the heavy watching now, whether it's TV series or marathon movies, and the rewards are, perhaps, those of a more texturally weighty, novelistic form of cinema. **S**

IN THE FRAME

ALL THE WORLD'S A SCREEN



Lear and present danger: Kurosawa Akira's *Ran*

Language is no barrier to loving Shakespeare – as shown by the global popularity of his plays as a source for cinema

By David Thompson

"Perhaps the most successful Shakespeare film ever made was the Japanese *Macbeth*, *Throne of Blood*. This had hardly any words, and none of them by Shakespeare." That was the judgement of Peter Hall in 1969, a year after he produced a critically panned film version of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. While Hall, for all his famous honouring of the text, failed to make the greatest of dramatists come to life on film, in *Throne of Blood* (1957) Kurosawa Akira boldly applied the visual artistry he displayed in the *Seven Samurai* (1954) to create a poetic and thrilling adventure out of the Bard's bloody tragedy.

Of around 200 sound films made from Shakespeare's plays, about 50 are in a foreign language. In the silent era, filmmakers had no particular issue with the verse, since title cards could be easily translated and of necessity often consisted of a simple précis. Shakespeare adaptations were plentiful in France and Italy, and Germany produced two feature-length films – *Othello* (1922) with Emil Jannings, and *Hamlet* (1920) with Asta Nielsen. The androgynous Nielsen was not just indulging in some fashionable cross-dressing, as Sarah Bernhardt had done. She played the character as a melancholic princess, required for the purposes of succession to pose as a man and guard her secret from the object of her love, Horatio.

In Russia, Shakespeare became especially popular following the death of Stalin, under whom the censor was dismissive of Hamlet's "indecisiveness and depression" as "incompatible with the new Soviet spirit of optimism, fortitude and clarity". When Grigori Kozintsev made his epic 'Scope version of *Hamlet* (1964), he showed Elsinore as a veritable prison, the court a hotbed of murderous intrigue and his hero oppressed by a new dictator in the shape of Claudius. Kozintsev maximised the elemental aspects of Shakespeare even further in his *King Lear* (1970). He placed the waning king in a world populated by the oppressed poor, the homeless victims of civil war

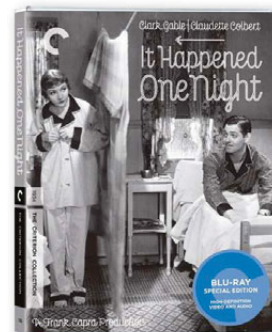
BFI Flare

London's LGBT festival turns 30 this year and, to celebrate, there's an enticing selection of great new films, including Barbara Hammer's documentary about poet Elizabeth Bishop, 'Welcome to This House' (right). The programme also revives films from its archive, among them Silas Howard and Harry Dodge's 2001 feature 'By Hook or by Crook'. Howard, the first transgender director of the TV series 'Transparent', will also attend to discuss his career.



Criterion

The US home cinema label that set the bar for high-quality, extras-laden DVD and Blu-ray packages is launching in the UK on 18 April, with five titles: silent slapstick 'Speedy', classic screwball 'It Happened One Night', documentary 'Grey Gardens', Roman Polanski's 'Macbeth' and Sydney Pollack's 'Tootsie'.



ON OUR
RADAR




Excellent fancy: Shahid Kapoor in the title role of Vishal Bhardwaj's *Haider*

who share his crowded hovel. Kozintsev strove to stay faithful to Shakespeare's text by using Boris Pasternak's translations – curiously, dismissed by Andrei Tarkovsky as “staggeringly inaccurate” (Tarkovsky produced *Hamlet* on stage himself, and was planning a film version before his death).

The powerful music Shostakovich composed for Kozintsev's films set a standard few could match, though Takemitsu Toru came close in his Mahlerian score for Kurosawa's *Ran* (1985). Like *Throne of Blood*, this transferred Shakespearian characters to a medieval Japanese context. While the three witches in *Macbeth* had become a single ghost out of Noh theatre, this Lear was based on a real historical figure, a ruthless warlord who divided his kingdom among three sons. *Ran* was clearly as much an expression of an ageing director's inner turmoil as an epic nihilistic drama, but it remains one of the most imposing Shakespeare adaptations from any source.

The country outside Britain that has most frequently adapted Shakespeare to the screen is India, for which presumably a colonial inheritance can be thanked. There are examples going back to the 1940s, but within the last decade there have been two lavish Bollywood musical treatments of *Romeo and Juliet*, arguably aesthetically closer to the New York of *West Side Story* (1961) than to an imaginary Verona.

One director, Vishal Bhardwaj, has made raw, compelling crime dramas out of *Macbeth*, *Othello* and *Hamlet* – *Maqbool* (2004), *Omkara* (2006) and *Haider* (2014), respectively. The last is especially striking for its use of the 1995 Kashmir conflicts as a background, with its young hero a student who turns revolutionary in his quest for the truth about his father's death.

Clothing Shakespearean plots in familiar cinema genres has long been Hollywood's ploy to avoid confusing an audience with a text full of idioms and meanings lost over 400 years. Many foreign-language adaptations have also enjoyed this lack of responsibility, from Italian westerns (*Johnny Hamlet*, 1968) to *wuxia* epics (Feng Xiaogang's version of *Hamlet*, *The Banquet*, 2006). My personal prize goes to Aki Kaurismäki's *Hamlet Goes Business* (1987), a hilarious, deadpan take, set in a family-run rubber-duck company and adding an unexpected twist to its morbid conclusion. As a nod to Kozintsev, Kaurismäki even makes ironic use of Shostakovich on his soundtrack. 

i *Ran* is rereleased in the UK on 1 April. 'Shakespeare on Film' runs at BFI Southbank, London, from 31 March – 31 May. David Thompson's *Arena: All the World's a Screen* – *Shakespeare on Film* will be shown on BBC4 in late April

LISTOMANIA COURTROOM FILMS

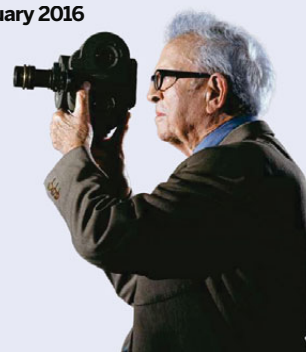
With the jury unanimous in its acclaim of Chaitanya Tamhane's satirical drama *Court*, we judge the best of the rest from cinema history.

- 1 **Adam's Rib (1949)**
George Cukor
- 2 **12 Angry Men (1956)**
Sidney Lumet
- 3 **Anatomy of a Murder (1959)**
Otto Preminger
- 4 **Judgment at Nuremberg (1961)**
Stanley Kramer
- 5 **To Kill a Mockingbird (1962)**
Robert Mulligan
- 6 **The Verdict (1982)**
Sidney Lumet
- 7 **Jagged Edge (1985)**
Richard Marquand
- 8 **Bamako (2006)**
Abderrahmane Sissako
- 9 **Terror's Advocate (2007)**
Barbet Schroeder
- 10 **A Separation (2011)**
Asghar Farhadi



QUOTE OF THE MONTH DOUGLAS SLOCOMBE

'Every square inch in a 20,000 square foot picture is the cameraman's own'
British cinematographer,
born 10 February 1913
– died 22 February 2016



iViva! Spanish and Latin American Festival

Spanish-language cinema's leading UK showcase returns to HOME, Manchester (7-24 April) with Pablo Trapero's crime saga 'The Clan' (right), a retrospective of Argentinian actor Ricardo Darín's films and a screening of Mexican horror 'The Mansion of Madness' (1973), featuring costumes designed by surrealist artist Leonora Carrington, among the many highlights.



Agnieszka Holland

A highlight of this year's Kinoteka Polish Film Festival (7-28 April) in London is a season of Holland's films and TV work at BFI Southbank. Among the films screened will be a new restoration of 'A Woman Alone', her searing 1981 critique of Communist Poland. Holland (right) will appear in conversation on 12 April, the first instalment in a new monthly strand at the BFI dedicated to female filmmakers, entitled 'Woman with a Movie Camera'.



SWEET DREAMS

From the family-size Malteser box to Céline and Julie's magic bonbons, confectionery is integral to the experience of movie-going



By Hannah McGill

The association between eating sweets and watching movies dates back to the nickelodeon theatres of the early 20th century, which were

quickly recognised as prime retail opportunities by popcorn and candy vendors. The concession stand soon became a vital aspect of cinema business, and to this day is often a more reliable source of income than the films themselves. Arguably, the historic link between indulgent foodstuffs and movie viewing contributes to the enduring perception of cinema as a lesser artform, the function of which is to be buzzily calorific rather than nourishing. In *Céline and Julie Go Boating* (1974), however, Jacques Rivette gives the maligned sweetie a more creative role. Sweets are not an accompaniment to cinematic escapism, but the key to it: only by consuming coloured candies can Céline and Julie access the alternate reality in which they get to watch other lives play out. The idea is a faintly druggy one, of course – although this pair are portrayed more as gauche, curious children than intoxicated hipsters. It clearly draws on *Alice in Wonderland*, references to which abound throughout the film: Alice too can move between realms and manipulate her own corporeal form by eating sweetmeats. But the sweeties are also part of a battery of feminine objects – lipsticks, dolls, tarot cards, sick room flowers, gloves – that are toyed with and subverted by Céline, Julie and the ghosts they encounter. Munching and watching, thrilled by the turns in the narrative, the two women are a happy caricature of absorbed spectatorship. But they are also the very definition of active spectators. They literally place themselves within the story, identifying with the narrative strongly enough to affect it.



Sugar rush: *Céline and Julie Go Boating* (1974)

Female consumers of soft-centred melodrama, the film suggests, need not be considered passive: there are sweet things the eating of which can confer insight and creative power.

The idea that misery befalls those who succumb to sweet temptations is an inheritance from myth and fairytale – Persephone baited with pomegranate seeds, Hansel and Gretel ensnared by the gingerbread house – given its most vivid cinematic life in the two versions of Roald Dahl's story, *Willy Wonka & the Chocolate Factory* (1971) and *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* (2005). Failure to properly manage one's appetites spells susceptibility to decadence and danger. Sofia Coppola's *Marie Antoinette* (2005), though it largely pleads sympathy for

its much maligned subject, also emphasises her lack of social perspective by surrounding her with sweetmeats. A boy aptly named Hansel is tempted via a trail of Gummy Bears into a relationship that will cost him more than his heart in *Hedwig and the Angry Inch* (2001). The freaky sweetshop in *The Wicker Man* (1973), with its skulls, toads, chocolate rams' heads, life-sized iced babies and "lovely March hares", provides one of the early indicators that all is not as it should be on Summerisle. In *Life Is Sweet* (1990) chocolate provides routes to self-denial, self-indulgence and self-abasement alike for the miserable Nicola. And in Dušan Makavejev's stomach-churning satire *Sweet Movie* (1974) the association between sugary stuff and



Candy girl: Dušan Makavejev's stomach-churning *Sweet Movie* (1974)



Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory (1971)

BET NATIONAL ARCHIVE (©RONALD GRANT ARCHIVE/C)



Arguably, the link between indulgent foodstuffs and movies contributes to the perception of cinema as a lesser artform

corruption goes still further, with juxtaposed imagery of food, sex, defecation and death; the female body presented as if for consumption; and a female serial killer who uses sweets to lure her male victims to their deaths.

A sugar rush needn't always leave a nasty aftertaste, however. Perhaps in recognition of the historically symbiotic relationship between candy and cinema, and certainly as a specific sop to paying commercial interests, a weakness for sweets has sometimes been used to humanise a character. Reese's Pieces encourage us to love the alien in *E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial* (1982); a Baby Ruth bar turns Sloth from a monster to a friend in *The Goonies* (1985); and a free-spirited lady chocolatier brings sex and sweetness to the lives of abstemious bores in *Chocolat* (2000).

The notion of sweets as a source of subversive female power is given free rein in *Candyman* (1992), in which the ghost of a murdered slave steals children and leaves a calling card of razorblades in candy wrappers. As his story is revealed, the film's murderous monster becomes its tragic hero; and his vengeful mantle passes to the ghost of his victim, Helen, whom he seduces with the phrase "Sweets to the sweet..." As Candyman has punished the descendants of those who lynched him, Helen punishes her unfaithful husband and the patriarchy that protects him. The industries of slavery and romance, after all, owe even more to sugar than the movies do. 🍬

THE FIVE KEY...

FILMS ABOUT WITCHES

Forget your toil and trouble, and enjoy a spell of relaxation with this coven-ready list of screen sorceresses

By Nikki Baughan

For his first feature *The Witch* (reviewed on page 66), the writer-director Robert Eggers has mined historical documents from America's colonial past to craft the story of a family torn apart by accusations of witchcraft in the Puritan heartland of early 17th-century New England. While Eggers's film is being praised for its terrifying authenticity, the shadowy figure of the witch has long been a source of fascination to filmmakers, across myriad nationalities and genres. Whether she be crone or hag, enchantress or vamp, one thing remains constant: a witch's power, of either the practical or seductive variety, should never be underestimated, as these five examples show.



1 *Häxan: Witchcraft Through the Ages* (1922)

Danish director Benjamin Christensen's film recounts the history of European witchcraft from the Middle Ages and, thanks to its procession of potent images, still packs a punch almost a century after release. It's also a deft psychological exploration of hysteria – the hysteria of the grief-stricken woman, branded as a witch after the death of her lover, and of those eager to blame such emotions on the occult.



2 *Suspiria* (1977)

The nightmarish imagery of *giallo* master Dario Argento's study of occultism in 1970s Germany conjures up a vision of witchcraft rooted in ancient European tradition. An innocent American student (the wide-eyed Jessica Harper) enrolls in a German dance studio only to discover it is run by a coven of grotesque haridans. It's a visceral culture clash that's not soon forgotten.



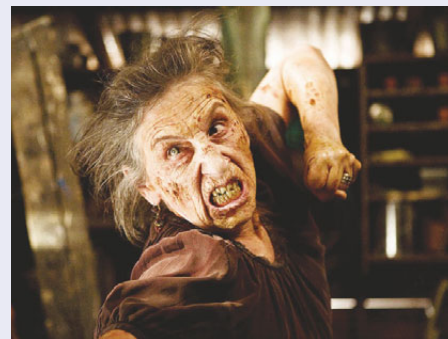
3 *The Witches of Eastwick* (1987)

The witches of George Miller's mid-80s camp classic are a triptych of singletons (Cher, Michelle Pfeiffer and Susan Sarandon) who use their combined power to summon their dream man – who turns out to be the devil (Jack Nicholson). Despite somewhat chauvinistic assumptions about women's priorities, the film uses the supernatural effectively to poke fun at the traditional relationship between the sexes.



4 *The Craft* (1996)

Adolescence and the occult are natural bedfellows, mood swings and sexual awakenings being their own kind of powerful black magic. Filmmaker Andrew Fleming makes the most of this beguiling thematic symbiosis, allowing his teen coven to wreak increasing amounts of havoc on their high-school contemporaries until their abilities threaten to overwhelm their true sense of self.



5 *Drag Me to Hell* (2009)

The witch in Sam Raimi's schlocker is the very definition of a crone – a haggard, twisted old woman who unleashes a powerful curse on the young loan officer (Alison Lohman) who evicts her from her home. While Raimi's on-the-nose B-movie pastiche is played for laughs, the fact that the witch's ancient powers easily best the exuberance of youth is terrifying for a modern horror audience.



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AFTERSHOCK

With a film she co-wrote in the running for an Oscar and her second feature as director on release, Alice Winocour is on a roll

By Simran Hans

Writer-director Alice Winocour cut her teeth at La Fémis (class of 2002), Paris's most prestigious film school, where she met fellow filmmaker Deniz Gamze Ergüven. While she found funding for her debut *Augustine* (2012), a period drama about female hysteria set in 19th-century Paris, Ergüven struggled to finance her first feature. In 2015 they co-wrote, and Ergüven directed, *Mustang*, a drama about the physical and mental oppression of five sisters in a Turkish village. The only film by a female director nominated for an Oscar in 2016, in the Best Foreign Language Film category, it will be released in the UK in May.

Winocour's new film *Disorder* plays with similar themes of paranoia and bodily disconnection, though her focus has shifted from the feminine. Matthias Schoenaerts is Vincent, a soldier-turned-bodyguard sent to protect a Lebanese businessman's trophy wife (Diane Kruger), all the while suffering the after-effects of a stint in Afghanistan. Schoenaerts inhabits the role of a man moving through a world he no longer understands; Winocour makes the audience inhabit his perceptions. Her camera shifts erratically, juddering or moving as though it's being dragged through molasses; the dizzying, dreamlike effect is doubly unsettling when coupled with the distorted electronic score by French techno DJ Gesaffelstein (né Mike Lévy).

Simran Hans: What inspired you to make a film about trauma?

Alice Winocour: I had a special relationship with the subject: I suffered myself from PTSD. When I gave birth to my daughter I almost died, and I woke up in the hospital and didn't know where I was. I remember feeling vertigo; I only had memories of the sounds of this experience. At first when I write something I need to be really connected to the subject in a very intimate way; it was the same with my first feature, *Augustine*, which was about hysterics, and women expressing rebellion with their bodies.

I imagined this soldier coming back from war and you never know if there is a real threat around the house, or if it's the effect of his paranoia. To me, doubt is the major ingredient for the paranoid thriller – I really wanted the audience to feel this vertigo as the character. That's why we worked to make the sound so weird, so that you never know if it's a dream, a nightmare or reality.

SH: What were your reference points?

AW: I was really inspired by narratives such as [Jeff Nichols's] *Take Shelter* [2011] or *The Conversation* [1974], by Coppola – where the audience is in the head and in the body of the character. I also thought a lot about Antonioni's *La notte* [1961] – the party was inspired by that movie. I was also really inspired by the work of Don McCullin – you know, the one who did the picture for *Blow-Up*.

SH: Can you tell me about Gesaffelstein and the work you both did on the sound design?

AW: I'm a fan of electro music and of Gesaffelstein



Alice Winocour: 'I don't want my film to be looked at only because it's a female thing'

I suffered from PTSD. When I gave birth I almost died, and I woke up in the hospital and didn't know where I was

in particular. I found his music was kind of violent but at the same time exhilarating. There's just something about it that feels like the end of the world and everything falling apart that's at the same time almost religious. Also, I thought we had to recreate – because there are no flashbacks in the film – the mental landscape of soldiers coming back from war, and that's what I think the music is like.

SH: I love the casting of Matthias

Schoenaerts as a sensitive thug. Did you have him in mind when you were writing?

AW: I had seen *Bullhead* [2011] and I was amazed by his performance. I wrote for him because I knew he had this animality. I wanted to work with him with these borderline states – you needed to see in his eyes that he was coming back from another world, that he was not there any more, so he was not sleeping on the shoot – only two hours a night. He got very close to his own demons.

There's this sequence when the two main characters are watching TV together and I was always saying to Diane that this was the sex scene. Of course they're not having sex but there is this

intimacy – the world is falling apart around them and they are sharing this little moment together.

I really wanted the last shot of the film to be in this no man's land. I like this idea of paranoia in love. He's always expecting danger behind him but at the end it's love that is coming up behind him.

SH: How did *Mustang*, which you co-wrote with Deniz Gamze Ergüven, come about?

AW: We went to the same school, La Fémis, but we really met in Cannes. We were both selected for L'Atelier [a workshop that puts young filmmakers in touch with industry professionals] and we were the two women and the ten others were men. Deniz said something really funny about this – when we met it was like we were coming out of the same spaceship. I can only write with people I feel this immediate connection with.

The idea of rebelling against a patriarchal society was a theme I could recognise from my first feature. I wanted to describe men looking at women as both the object of desire and the object of fear. It's grounded in the reality of today's Turkey but also we thought about it as a fairytale. It's also about liberating yourself from your own family.

SH: Is it important to direct your own writing?

AW: Yeah, it's important. I was inspired by the idea of directing an action film. There should be no boundaries for women directors now. We can direct any type of film.

SH: There shouldn't be boundaries for female directors, but there are. What are the biggest challenges you've faced?

AW: It surprised me that people in Cannes were surprised that a woman could express violence. People were always telling me that I was like the French Kathryn Bigelow – I really like her work, but sometimes I feel I'm more different from her than from a male director. I don't want my film to be looked at only because it's a female thing. I didn't want to make a female thriller – I just wanted to make a story that's important to me. **S**

i *Disorder* is released in the UK on 25 February and is reviewed on page 74



Matthias Schoenaerts in *Disorder*

GUILTY PLEASURES



There's nothing like bunking off to go and sit in an empty cinema on a Tuesday afternoon to rejuvenate your love for film



By Mark Cousins

I usually plan what I'm going to say in this column, but this time I haven't. Instead, I'm going to start with the following

situation and see where it leads me: last Tuesday afternoon, I saw *The Hateful Eight* in an Odeon in Edinburgh, and I was the only one in the cinema. I'd walked 3.8 miles, from my flat to an Odeon in a retail park near where the great filmmaker Bill Douglas was born. Tarantino's film feels like a long, wide display, and yet only I witnessed it. It was like being alone on a mountain top.

I loved the experience. The film itself had its great pleasures (and some pains), but how I saw it made it special. My expectation built as I walked from busy central Edinburgh, through housing estates and the green belt. As the trailers ran, and I realised that as yet no one else had shown up, I got excited. It was such an ordinary February day, people were shopping or working, and I'd bunked off to see something extended, extravagant, visual and almost sadistic in its demand that I submit to its impositions.

You could psychoanalyse this experience, I'm sure, but I would sum up my pleasure as 'Tuesday afternoon-ness'. As the lights went down, I realised that it was the collision between this ordinary day and this luminous cinerama that I was about to see that I liked so much. Maybe collision's the wrong word: let's say the

'dissolve' between Tuesday afternoon-ness and Tarantino-ness. Recently I tried to describe how colour works best in film when it's a world shift ('Flying colours', *S&S*, February), and that's what happened to me last Tuesday. I'm not exactly talking about escapism here, because I'm lucky enough to have a good life, so it's not one that I have the desire to escape. It's more like feeling the world change around you, as it does in the revolving kiss in Hitchcock's *Vertigo* (1958), as it does in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*.

The key phrase is 'around you', I think. I never get excited when I watch a film at home, on my TV; even less so on my computer. Such viewings are embedded in my ordinary life, of course, so should pass the Tuesday afternoon-ness test. But they aren't a world shift. And – confession time – I don't always get the feeling at film festivals these days. I'm spoilt, of course. I've run many film festivals and attended many more, mostly as a director. And I passionately believe that film festivals are necessary because the market fails to bring us the variety of films that are being made. They are, to grab a phrase from Paul Schrader, the spice of life not the meat and potatoes.

So why am I raising doubts about them? The simple answer is that, in almost all cases, when I go to a film festival now, I'm working, and Tuesday afternoon-ness is about not working. Also, there are the crowds. I know that part of the creed of film-going is the pleasure of seeing a movie, especially a comedy, with others – the collective laughter or thrill – but I think

Maybe my best way to see a film is to have lots of nothing before it and more nothing after it, as if it's an oasis in the desert

I value being away from the numbers a lot, again because everyday life is so busy. My *The Hateful Eight* experience has made me think that maybe my best way to see a film is to have lots of nothing before it and more nothing after it (see my heretical verdict on Q&As, 'Not so grand inquisitors', *S&S*, December 2013), as if it's an oasis in the desert. When you're a filmmaker, film festivals are frenzied kingdoms of the lanyard. Is there one, somewhere, that's more like a desert? Trappist, Bressonian or deadpan days interrupted by explosions of cinema, of life? Film festivals always aim to be Dionysian, but could a few of them be Apollonian?

I know this sounds jaded or misanthropic, two things which I ain't. I love films more than ever, I sit closer to the screen than ever, I cry at them more than ever. Life toughens you up, it's said. Your skin gets thicker, your armour more robust as you batter through. But something like the opposite happens. Battering tenderises many people, like it tenderises beef. And so you become more sensitised to Tuesday afternoon-ness, and Tarantino-ness. You're more attuned to their frequencies, so background noise interferes. It's a roar. Film festivals are a roar. And, to contradict myself, I love roars. I love sensory overload, dancing to loud music, the sea on a stormy night, the madness of *Mad Max: Fury Road*, the fury of the trafficky, ordinary street on which I live.

But backgrounds assert. David Lynch has a way of scoring the visual noise of a room. If it has big patterned wallpaper or is full of people, or has a fire with big flames, or is very cluttered, he'll give it an eight or nine. It's his way of saying how much more a room can take, or how calm you feel within it. Such scoring is useful, I think. Tuesday is a one, Tarantino is a nine. Add them together and you get... 9

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DEVELOPMENT TALE

COURT



Trial run: Vira Sathidar as Marathi folk-singer Narayan Kamble in *Court*

For Chaitanya Tamhane, getting his debut feature *Court* made was a trial – but he’s been vindicated by festival juries and the box office

By Charles Gant

The Mumbai-born director Chaitanya Tamhane received early encouragement when his 2011 debut short *Six Strands* was selected for international film festivals, including Rotterdam and Edinburgh. But he soon discovered that making the next step was not so easy. It took the generous intervention of a friend to set him on a path that would lead to international acclaim for his feature *Court*, which was India’s submission for the Foreign Language category in this year’s Oscars.

“I was completely broke,” Tamhane explains. “I had no money to survive. And that’s when I started getting a lot of pressure from my family. I hadn’t moved out of my parents’ house, and they were really worried for me. I didn’t want to assist anybody, even in a film-related scenario, if it meant I wouldn’t get to do my own work.”

He did, however, have the germ of an idea. “I was watching this American TV show called *The Defenders*, something like that. We

see these very dramatic portrayals on TV, with these slick lawyers. I randomly started wondering what it must be like to attend a case in a lower court in Mumbai. I did just that, and I was utterly fascinated. It was nothing like anything I’d seen, even in Indian films and TV shows. It was completely chaotic. It was theatre of a very different kind.”

Tamhane had met actor Vivek Gumber when he directed him in a play in Mumbai called *Grey Elephants in Denmark*. Now, in 2011, the pair met again, and Gumber immediately sensed something was wrong. “I’m in a bit of trouble right now,” Tamhane told him, “because it’s time when I have to step up and find a real job.” Instead, Gumber agreed to fund his friend (“I needed a little less than \$300 a month to survive”), with no strings attached, so he could develop his screenplay idea.

Tamhane spent the next year visiting the court, interviewing lawyers and judges, reading books about the judiciary. He knew that he wanted to give texture to the characters of his defender, prosecutor and judge, presenting their lives outside the courtroom, but had yet to find a story hook. Then he became interested in local activists and protest singers who were using the Marathi-language folk music of Maharashtra state as a form of dissent. He also read about

the condition of the sewer workers, who are principally drawn from India’s lowest social strata. “There is absolutely no attention paid to their health and safety. A lot of them work on a contract basis, so the municipal corporation is not liable if they die.” Suddenly Tamhane had his story: a privileged lawyer who is also an outsider (played by Gumber) defending a Marathi folk-singer accused in a Mumbai lower court of inciting the suicide of a sewer worker.

When the script was finally ready, Tamhane and Gumber, serving also as producer, took the project to the National Film Development Corporation of India for funding, but were turned down. “Then we tried going to NFDC Bazaar, which is for international co-productions, and that didn’t work out,” Tamhane says. “We had no contacts in the industry, we didn’t know anybody. It wasn’t like we could approach nine different people. It is difficult to get funding for these kind of films.” Gumber then committed to financing the film himself.

Apart from Gumber and theatre actress Geetanjali Kulkarni, as his courtroom adversary, Tamhane cast non-professionals in every role. “Bollywood has a very strong influence on the acting style and the way people work here, so I wanted to move away from that,” Tamhane says. “I knew I would have to cast real faces of

Mumbai for the city to come alive.” Led by a casting director with a theatre background, a 12-person team sourced actors by going to railway company amateur theatre groups, schools and banks, and handing out fliers at tea stalls across Mumbai. “The criterion was that these people should be interested in acting, but they shouldn’t be actors. Actors are not welcome. The cast is very diverse, so it needed a very diverse approach. It was like a social project.”

Meanwhile an initial hope that *Court* could be shot on the fly for \$250,000 proved unrealistic. “We realised this film actually requires complete control. It’s a difficult film to execute because it’s real locations, which in Mumbai are very chaotic. You need to get permissions from four different agencies. And it will require a lot of junior artists [ie extras], and we are doing synch sound, which also means controlling the environment. And because these will be non-professional actors saying scripted lines, and such long, uninterrupted takes, we can only shoot one scene a day. And then for the courtroom, we were not happy with any of the options, so we built a set from scratch.”

Shooting required maximum patience. “We would do 30, 35 takes, going up to 65 takes. If one thing goes wrong, you have to start all over again. The edit process was more of a hunting adventure for us: finding just the right take with the right in and the right out that fits in rhythmically and does justice to the character and

When we were close to release, we had won 17 international awards, and nobody cared. It doesn’t mean anything

the entire scene. You have your fingers crossed, because there’s just no escape. Most of the scenes except for the courtroom scenes have no cuts.”

Court was accepted into the 2014 Venice Film Festival, winning two major prizes, and thereafter cut a swathe through the international festival circuit – but distribution in India remained a challenge. “The definition of arthouse in India is very different,” Tamhane explains. “For an Indian audience, *The Lunchbox* would be very arthouse. We don’t have arthouse screens. When we were close to release, we had won 17 international awards by then, and nobody cared. It doesn’t mean anything.”

Salvation came when, three weeks before the planned self-distributed release last spring, *Court* unexpectedly won Best Feature Film at India’s National Film Awards. “It’s like the Indian Oscars,” says Tamhane. “You get the award from the president of the country. So that suddenly became a very big deal.” *Court* opened in 150 cinemas, a mix of major cities and venues in the state of Maharashtra where it could ride the local ‘Marathi pride’ wave, achieving 100,000 admissions. Home entertainment, however, is a whole other story. “People don’t trust websites with their credit cards here,” Tamhane says. “Piracy is very normal. It’s a tough battle to fight.”

i *Court* is released in UK cinemas on 25 March and is reviewed on page 62

THE NUMBERS YOUTH/A BIGGER SPLASH

By Charles Gant

With cinema audiences for foreign-language films declining in English-speaking markets, it’s probably no coincidence that many European filmmakers are working with international casts. Last year’s Cannes saw instances of that with Yorgos Lanthimos’s *The Lobster*, Matteo Garrone’s *Tale of Tales* and Paolo Sorrentino’s *Youth*. This last, starring Michael Caine, Harvey Keitel and Rachel Weisz, arrived in UK cinemas courtesy of StudioCanal exactly two weeks ahead of the same distributor’s *A Bigger Splash* – directed by Luca Guadagnino and starring Tilda Swinton, Ralph Fiennes, Matthias Schoenaerts and Dakota Johnson.

English-language doesn’t necessarily mean more box office: Sorrentino’s *This Must Be the Place* (2011), starring Sean Penn, remains one of his lowest-grossing films in the UK, while Guadagnino’s London-set debut *The Protagonists* (1999) was not released here.

For StudioCanal, according to distribution boss John Trafford-Owen, language wasn’t a specific factor in the acquisition of either *Youth* or *A Bigger Splash*, and “It didn’t matter where the director was from.” That said, the film’s casts were pluses in both instances, and Italian dialogue would have necessitated some different choices, notwithstanding Swinton’s achievements with Italian in Guadagnino’s *I Am Love* (2009).

In the case of *Youth*, StudioCanal had a strong relationship with co-producer Number 9 Films (Stephen Woolley, Liz Karlsen), and the film’s likely appeal to an older audience offered an identifiable target. With *A Bigger Splash*, which StudioCanal itself co-produced, the overall package of script, director and cast was strong.

The distributor released both titles in the pre-Bafta corridor, thus making them eligible for awards consideration, but no nominations resulted. The consequence was a highly competitive environment, especially for *Youth*, which landed in busy



Going swimmingly: *A Bigger Splash*

late January, but there were also upsides. “I’m not saying that Sir Michael wouldn’t have supported the film otherwise,” Trafford-Owen says, “but it does give people a focus.”

As for *A Bigger Splash*, which landed in UK cinemas just two days before the Baftas ceremony, many of the awards titles were by then beginning to fade. “*The Revenant* had taken £20 million,” says Trafford-Owen. “It was still doing well, but there was definitely a gap for an upmarket arthouse film, and this was it.”

At press time, *Youth* had grossed £794,000 and looked set to fall short of *The Great Beauty*’s £1 million haul – although Trafford-Owen says it has “good run-on capability with the older audience, with weekday matinees”. *A Bigger Splash* earned £748,000 in its first ten days, and will easily sail past *I Am Love*’s £927,000.

Meanwhile, StudioCanal is not about to vacate the foreign-language space, having released both *The Assassin* and *A War* in January, with Jacques Audiard’s *Dheepan* to follow in April. “It’s very important as a company that we keep a mix of films, from *Paddington* to *A Girl Walks Home Alone at Night*,” Trafford-Owen says. “More and more tentpole titles find their way into the independent chains, and then there are also live events in cinemas. It doesn’t get any easier, but it just means we have to be smarter, identify the films that can perform to the highest level, and back them accordingly.”

ITALIAN DIRECTORS AT THE UK BOX OFFICE

Film	Year	Gross
Life Is Beautiful	1999	£3,083,174
Cinema Paradiso	1990	£1,512,905*
The Great Beauty	2013	£1,000,997
Gomorrah	2008	£944,551
I Am Love	2010	£926,655
Youth	2016	£793,557†
A Bigger Splash	2016	£748,428†
The Leopard (rereleases)	2003/2010	£452,514
The Consequences of Love	2005	£450,581
Mediterraneo	1993	£384,153

*Includes subsequent rereleases; †grosses at 22 February

BERLINALE

TELLING TALES



New horizons: Mia Hansen-Løve's *Things to Come*, stars Isabelle Huppert as a woman coming to terms with the changes taking place in the world around her

Story was king at Berlin this year, a festival whose finest films eschewed stylistic innovation in favour of novelistic ambition

By Jonathan Romney

When you compile a festival overview, you hope that you can pin down a story, however slender or artificial – a narrative thread to knit together a whole spread of disparate films. This year, I can't help thinking that the story in the Berlinale was story itself. Even someone like me, who instinctively recoils at the film industry tenet that "it's got to be about story", had to admit that this year's festival was exceptionally rich in films that grappled with the fundamentals of telling tales.

That doesn't mean there was a huge amount of stylistic innovation involved: some of the best films felt very rooted in tradition, but managed to say something about the contemporary experience in a specific idiosyncratic way. Two of the best Competition films were the work of a pair of French writer-directors who have always felt like cinematic novelists in the best sense, insofar as they habitually explore the interlinked fortunes of complex characters who don't reveal all their secrets easily, but emerge gradually, sometimes obscurely, just as people do in the real world. André Téchiné's *Being 17*, co-written with

Girlhood director Céline Sciamma, is perhaps not his most involving exercise in this mode, but it's powerful and beautifully worked through. It's about the simmering hostility, then rapport between two teenage boys (Kacey Mottet Klein and Corentin Fila – both superb), which unfolds against an imposing Pyrenean backdrop.

Even better was Mia Hansen-Løve's *Things to Come*. Having established herself as a leading young voice in French cinema, she follows her club-culture frieze *Eden* (2014) with a film about an older person at once looking back and forward, balancing her past idealism against the uncertain values of a new generation. Isabelle Huppert is Nathalie, a philosophy teacher and editor who sees the world changing around her.



Kurosawa Kiyoshi's *Creepy*

With a troubled mother to attend to (the sublime Edith Scob) and a husband (a terrific André Marcon) with a bombshell to drop, Nathalie visits the radical commune of an ex-student. It's all delivered in a loose narrative package that's full of witty digressions, although it's more tightly structured than *Eden*. Huppert gives one of her best, certainly most relaxed, recent performances in a film which, in its modest but controlled way, does something truly radical – puts an intellectual middle-aged woman centre-stage and lets her fly.

Two genre treats. Playing out of Competition was *Creepy*, Kurosawa Kiyoshi's thriller about a cop and his very weird neighbour. Kurosawa praised the Master of Suspense in the documentary *Hitchcock/Truffaut* (2015), and *Creepy* uses his lessons to mischievous effect – although the film arguably runs into a brick wall when it gets into what you might call its Park Chan-wook hysterical phase. Then there was Competition feature *Midnight Special* by Jeff Nichols, one of the most dedicatedly no-nonsense yarn-spinners in US cinema. Some colleagues didn't go for it, and I can see why: it starts in one genre (the gritty thriller mode of back roads and cheap motels) before dramatically and unexpectedly crashing the barrier into another (visionary science fiction). That dissonance may not play so easily these days, but Nichols is simply recovering some of the possibilities of what certain Spielberg and John Carpenter films did

in the 80s, and doing it with fabulous audacity. And how often do you see a film in which the weirdest eyes on screen aren't Michael Shannon's?

The Competition had its share, as ever, of solemn duds, of which Michael Grandage's literary anecdote *Genius* was the most preposterous, and Denis Côté's boutique melodrama *Boris Without Béatrice* (so pallid it should have been called *Borscht Without Beetroot*) the most glossily ponderous. But a stand-out for me was **Letters from War**, by Portuguese director Ivo M. Ferreira. It's based on the correspondence of novelist António Lobo Antunes, stationed as a military doctor in Angola in 1971, as Portugal attempts to maintain its grip on the colony. As he grows disillusioned with the colonial mission, we hear his letters to his wife, read in voiceover by Miguel Nunes, but more often by Margarida Vila-Nova – as if Maria-José is living through her husband's experience at a distance.

Meanwhile, the doctor's African experience is reconstructed minutely in stark black and white, shot with breathtaking richness of texture by João Ribeiro. This is the most beautiful war film I've seen since *The Thin Red Line*, but it also feels coolly analytical, a worthy film to consider alongside Miguel Gomes's more playful musing on Portugal's African misadventure, *Tabu* (2012).

It was also good to see the return of Rafi Pitts – the Iranian director of 2006's *It's Winter* – exploring new territory in **Soy Nero**, a modern *Candide*-style story about a young Mexican (Johnny Ortiz) trying to secure US residency, initially by focusing on not getting deported, then by enlisting in the US army: a real-world issue given a dream-like fabulist slant. Also striking was Tomasz Wasilewski's *United States of Love*, the interlocking stories of four women in early 90s Poland, a perplexingly constructed jigsaw, shot by the celebrated Oleg Mutu in an icily bleached-out palette. And one to note from the Panorama section was **All of a Sudden**, the first German feature by Turkish director Asli Ozge. It's about a young man whose privileged life starts showing cracks when a woman is found dead in his apartment. Ozge picks over familiar tropes in her dissection of small-town bourgeois self-interest, but it's done with elegance and rigour.

Now for a film less interested in story than in investigating the intricacies of the self – although technically it qualifies as a biopic. Terence Davies's **A Quiet Passion** is about the life and travails of the poet Emily Dickinson. While you can't imagine this director ever making a film not entirely suffused with his distinctive cultural and emotional sensibilities, this one gives you the Full Terry and then some – not least because it dares go so far in the direction of intensity and austerity. Its formal, sometimes theatrical register will require a leap of faith for many viewers, but what's remarkable also is the lightness – especially when a quietly exuberant Dickinson exchanges crisp one-liners, halfway between Austen and Dorothy Parker, with her friend Miss Buffam (played by Catherine Bailey). Those scenes are like a scintillating *scherzo* offsetting the solemn and heart-wrenching movements that follow in this chamber symphony. Cynthia Nixon is magnetic as a mercurial, self-possessed Dickinson.

The big event in Competition – the mountain you had to choose whether or not to scale – was



Eight hours that shook the world: Lav Diaz's revolutionary epic *A Lullaby to the Sorrowful Mystery*

Lav Diaz's 'A Lullaby to the Sorrowful Mystery' seems as much akin to Peter Brook's epic theatre as to any cinema

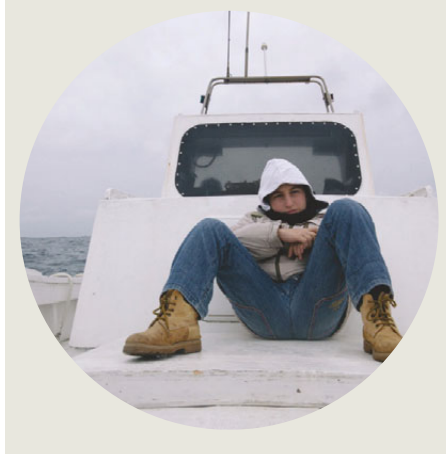
the eight-hour **A Lullaby to the Sorrowful Mystery**, the latest from world-class duration champ Lav Diaz. As a member of Meryl Streep's Competition jury, this magazine's editor was bound by *omertà* not to reveal how the judges planned their toilet breaks, but *Lullaby* was as demanding as you'd expect – and barring stretches where it slackened out, mesmerising.

A multi-strander set ostensibly during the Philippine Revolution of 1896-97 – although Diaz plays wonderfully fast and loose with visual and verbal anachronism – it involves a group of characters crossing paths in a forest, some of them historical figures, some borrowed from a 19th-century Philippine novel, and others supernatural, notably three half-horse beings who pull the narrative strings with the grace and malice of Shakespearean fairies. Every new Diaz film seems to retest the limits of filmic narrative, and while *Lullaby* isn't perhaps his most revelatory, its grappling with the complexities and legacies of history seems as much akin to Peter Brook's epic theatre as to any cinema we normally see.

And so to the deserving Golden Bear winner, **Fire at Sea** by documentary filmmaker Gianfranco Rosi. Here's one film less interested in telling a story as such than in describing a state of affairs. It's about the situation on the island of Lampedusa where, opening titles tell us, 400,000 migrants have arrived in the last 20 years, with a further 15,000 dying at sea. The film is partly a portrait of Lampedusa community – of a fishing family, of the DJ who plays traditional songs by request, and in particular of a nervy boy called Samuele, seen wreaking havoc on cacti with his hand-made catapult. Then there's the local doctor, whose duties form the link between the community and the migrants, whose agonies become more tangible as the film goes on. We see rescue missions intercepting boats crammed with dehydrated, petrol-burned migrants, who come to huddle on shore in thermal foil capes; we hear an extraordinary sung-spoken litany in which a Nigerian man narrates flight via Libya ("The sea is not a road... Oh, but today we are alive"); we are shown dead bodies in the junk-strewn hold of a boat. There's no doubt a debate to be had about the fact that the most direct testimony to the suffering is provided by the doctor who has witnessed it for so long ("It leaves you with emptiness in your gut"), but Rosi, who shot the film himself, offers no commentary or coercive narrative structuring. This is a deeply troubling, yet surprisingly beautiful work that you can't help but describe – hackneyed though the phrase is – as a wake-up call for a Europe increasingly deadened to compassion. ☹

BERLIN TOP TEN

1. **Letters from War** Ivo M. Ferreira
2. **Fire at Sea (below)** Gianfranco Rosi
3. **A Quiet Passion** Ulrich Seidl
4. **Things to Come** Mia Hansen-Løve
5. **Midnight Special** Jeff Nichols
6. **A Lullaby to the Sorrowful Mystery** Lav Diaz
7. **Being 17** André Téchiné
8. **Soy Nero** Rafi Pitts
9. **Hail, Caesar!** Ethan Coen, Joel Coen
10. **All of a Sudden** Asli Ozge



THINGS FALL APART

In Ben Wheatley's 'High-Rise', an adaptation of J.G. Ballard's novel of societal collapse in a 70s tower block, Tom Hiddleston plays an ordinary man forced to take sides when class tensions lead to anarchy. Here the actor reflects on issues of role-playing and identity

By Nick James

Not for the first time in recent years, Tom Hiddleston seems to be everywhere. By the time you read this, you may have seen him as Jonathan Pine, the chameleon-like lead character in the John le Carré spy thriller *The Night Manager*, a six-part BBC television series directed by Susanne Bier. It's only a few months since we saw him lead Mia Wasikowska into a mud-oozing gothic mansion in Guillermo del Toro's *Crimson Peak*. Coming soon is his incarnation of the great, haunted country singer-songwriter Hank Williams in *I Saw the Light*. But when I met him for lunch in a quiet backroom of Shoreditch House in the first week of the New Year, our principal topic was his central role in Ben Wheatley and Amy Jump's bravura adaptation of J.G. Ballard's *High-Rise*.

Hiddleston was on a break from filming the King Kong reboot *Kong: Skull Island*. "I'm half-way through," he told me. "Day 42 of 75, so I've been off officially for two weeks but you can't let it all go, there's an internal tension, you can't power down just yet." I got to have lunch with him in part because we became friendly in 2011 on the set on Terence Davies's *The Deep Blue Sea*, and I met him again in 2013 when *Sight & Sound* presented Jim Jarmusch's *Only Lovers Left Alive*, in which he plays Tilda Swinton's vampire lover, at the BFI London Film Festival. I hadn't seen him since then, and the one change I noticed when he arrived was that he's acquired



HOME TRUTHS

Tom Hiddleston says he was drawn to his role as Dr Laing in *High-Rise* (right) as a result of his fascination with the discrepancy between the surface identity we present to the world and the inner vulnerability we all feel. 'We all strive for consistency,' he says, 'but life isn't consistent'







In the war, Ballard wandered into a casino that had been bombed and in that moment he realised that reality was a stage set that could be dismantled at any time



serious biceps, as if he might himself wrestle with Kong's thumb or wield Thor's hammer.

As the names above show, since 2007, when he made his feature debut in Joanna Hogg's *Unrelated*, the actor has worked with an unusually impressive list of auteur directors – and I haven't even mentioned Woody Allen, for whom he played F. Scott Fitzgerald in *Midnight in Paris* (2011). It's this parallel career with some of the world's best directing talent from someone who is perhaps best known for playing Loki with such outright glee in *Thor* (2011) and *The Avengers* (2012) that makes him of special interest. For me, his particular quality lies in part in his ability to show exterior charisma and internal angst at the same time. But that's a simplification that doesn't account for his extraordinary, complex ability to constantly morph and yet be an everyman.

High-Rise is, of course, one of J.G. Ballard's most important novels. To adapt it has been a pet project of veteran producer Jeremy Thomas for decades, but previous versions involving Nicolas Roeg and later Richard Stanley did not get off the ground. Only now, with Wheatley at the helm, has it come to fruition. The story of the production is told through interviews with the cast and crew starting on the opposite page, but the book's basic premise concerns the opening of a huge modernist tower block in the 1970s, built by architect Anthony Royal (Jeremy Irons). Here the inhabitants are largely secluded from the outside world and live according to their social class, with the poorest members at the bottom of the building and the upper classes at the top. Tom Hiddleston's Dr Robert Laing moves into an apartment on the 25th floor (half-way up the social strata – Royal lives in the penthouse) and soon gets involved with Charlotte (Sienna Miller), an aide of Royal's, and encounters documentary filmmaker Richard Wilder (Luke Evans), who has been demoted to the second floor and seeks to agi-

tate for social change in the building. The situation in the building degenerates by degrees from apparent propriety to chaos and violence.

Nick James: Tell me about your *High-Rise* character.

Tom Hiddleston: I became a student of Ballard for about three months. I met Ben Wheatley when he came to see me on stage in *Coriolanus*. He'd already asked me to play Dr Laing, but it had also come through Jeremy Thomas – we had our relationship from *Only Lovers Left Alive* [which Thomas produced] and we liked each other enormously. They both came to the first preview, which had its own terrors – the first time you perform any play there's an insane amount of adrenalin. Then Ben and I had lunch – this is December 2013 – and I knew that they planned to make it in the summer, but I was the first actor to attach to the project. It meant that I had a much longer period than everyone else to prepare. I went to Toronto to work with Guillermo del Toro on *Crimson Peak*, but I would email [screenwriter] Amy Jump and we'd talk about the adaptation, the book and the script, and I asked Ben to send me films. What I always do is try to paste the inside of my brain with images and music and films and books and give myself a sense of the tone of what we're making. I need to build an imaginative framework within which I can then swing freely. Ben asked me to watch [Bernardo Bertolucci's 1970 film] *The Conformist*. Somehow if that trickled down into what I was doing that would be useful. He sent me a lot of German prog-rock and Amy sent me books on psychological theory from the 60s and 70s.

NJ: You read R.D. Laing?

TH: I did. Most people think Ballard probably didn't base the character on the real Laing, but the fact that he called him that is still interesting. Laing was in the zeitgeist of progressive philosophical thought at the time Ballard wrote the book. I also read a lot of Ballard, including

ANARCHY IN THE UK
Hiddleston with Elisabeth Moss (above), who plays the 'uncorrupted innocent' Helen Wilder, a woman trying to avoid the chaos that is taking over the block of flats

'A PROPHETIC FUTUROLOGIST'

It took producer Jeremy Thomas 40 years to bring 'High-Rise' to the screen. Below, from the set in Northern Ireland, key members of the team discuss their role in bringing J.G. Ballard's apocalyptic vision to life

By Neil McGlone



Ben Wheatley (director): I was looking along my bookshelf and I saw *High-Rise*. I'd read it when I was a student and really liked it.

It was one of the cornerstone books for me, along with *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*, *Naked Lunch* and *On the Road*. I'd been involved in a film called *You're Dead...* [1999], which was influenced by *High-Rise*. *You're Dead...* is about a bank heist that goes wrong and they all stay in the building and cannibalise each other. Ballard was definitely in the front of the mind for that. I thought, "No one's done *High-Rise*; why haven't they done it? It's weird."



Jeremy Thomas (producer): My son, who is a director's agent and works with a colleague of Ben Wheatley's agent, rang me

up and said that Ben was interested in *High-Rise* and had discovered that I had the book rights. So I met with Ben and saw that he's a natural.

BW: I was over at Jeremy's within four days. He'd actually seen *Sightseers* [2012] a week before. If I'd gone to see him a month before, he'd have gone: "Who the fuck's this?"

JT: Often on film projects you have an eye-opening moment, whether it's a change of heart or, "Oh well, I was thinking of this when in fact that's a better idea."

We had to adapt it in the period. I had been working on this project for so long that looking at the 70s from the beginning of the 2000s was a different tack, but it certainly clicked, yes.

BW: [Setting it in the past] was the first thing we wanted to do with it. The book is so 70s that it suffers once you start to adapt it into the future. It doesn't make sense anymore and the politics of it start to dissolve.

JT: If you talk about class in the last few years there's been more of a conflict between the middle classes and the super-rich. There wasn't so much of that in the 70s, but Ballard was already thinking of it. He was very much a

prophetic futurologist and he was thinking about the gated community with special living areas for rich people.

BW: I went to see Tom Hiddleston on stage in *Coriolanus*, which was terrifying because I was watching it thinking, "I'm going to have to talk about this with him. It's going to be like an A-level." But it was great and then we had a lunch and he's so sharp. Dr Laing is a tricky role and he's got to literally be balls out emotionally. He has to go there physically. We needed a partner who would do that with us. It's a big responsibility and a lot to study to understand the context of the role. It's not just something you can rock up and do. He's like a precision tool. When he's focused he's on it, like a laserbeam.



Laurie Rose (cinematographer): There was a decision across the board to do the 70s with the very lightest touch in terms of

design, costume, hair, make-up etc. We shot on new digital cameras, but I did use lenses made in the 60s and 70s.

Nick Gillespie (camera operator): Ben wanted a specific look that would not only resemble the 1970s but also suit the camera story. Having the option of some soft lenses with lots of little imperfections in them was key to this. Following what we'd learned from *A Field In England* [2013], we developed more lenses for *High-Rise*. We also experimented with old-school video cameras, and literally manipulated smoke and mirrors to get specific shots. We tested all these weird lenses built out of bits of old magnifying glasses and mouldable polymer solutions, until we had a whole set of *High-Rise* macros [close-up settings], each for a different set-up: actors' eyes, skin, fingerprints, concrete. 1970s kitchen appliances, insects, animals and water were all things we could look at.

BW: For me and [screenwriter] Amy Jump it was the idea that the children of the tower become us, or me anyway. As a 40-odd year-old man, I'm one of the kids that run around in the tower. We didn't want it to look like the greatest hits of the 70s, but we did want it to feel alien. The 70s were the last time there was a chance of



Miracles of Life, his autobiography, which I found fascinating. I reread *Concrete Island*, *High-Rise*, *Crash* and lots of interviews with him. The most fascinating aspect was seeing Laing in *High-Rise* in the context of Ballard's own life and work.

Let me unpack it for you. Laing is a single bachelor, a physiologist, someone with a professional detachment about the machinery of the human body, electrochemical signals to the brain. His job is to disassemble the machine parts of how our anatomy fits together and be detached about it. He moves into the high-rise to get away from the Dickensian gloom of the city, to escape real life. At the beginning of the novel he's recovering from a recent divorce and is persuaded to buy an apartment in the building by his sister. In the film, Laing is recovering from his sister's suicide. What appeals to him is that the flat represents his 2,000th share of the cliff-face, a piece of the sky in which he can hide. He's a grey man in a grey suit who can paint his apartment grey and fit in. He doesn't want to cause problems, he just wants his well-appointed slot halfway up.

I read a couple of things into all of that. It fascinated me that Ballard had a British upbringing in Shanghai that was not actually a British upbringing at all but a sort of colonial imagining of what being British meant. As a child he had a more vivid experience of Shanghai than most. There's all the random violence he saw when the Japanese invaded and he was put in the internment camp. In a paragraph in *Miracles of Life*, he describes wandering into a casino that had been bombed and deserted, and he says that, in that moment, seeing those ornate candelabra smashed on the gambling tables and these beautiful gauze felt chairs on the floor, with everything covered in dust, he realised that reality as a construct was a stage set that could be dismantled at any time.

Later, when he comes to Britain in the early 50s, he doesn't recognise the place he was educated to believe in. It's drab, it's depressing, people are still on rationing, it's dreary, brown and not epic. Thereafter he always felt like an outsider. He went to Cambridge to read medicine and stayed there for the first couple of years, which is basically a study in anatomy, and then gave it up because that was all he wanted to know. So it's no accident that Laing is a physiologist. The book is a kind of exploration in stripping away the mask of civilisation and seeing the darker impulses and urges beneath.

NJ: What made Laing attractive as a character to you?

TH: I'm fascinated by the discrepancy between the construction of identity as presented on the surface and the interior vulnerability and turbulence that we all feel. Identity is often a mask concealing less predictable, less conformist feelings and instincts. We all strive for consistency, but life isn't consistent. As a role, Laing was a specific challenge because he's detached, yet when life in the building begins spiralling out of control he has to make a stand and come down on one side of the line or the other, even though professionally he would say it's just neurons firing in the brain. Ben and I talked about the veneer of elegant sophistication and control versus a much more chaotic and out-of-control interior life.

NJ: The film begins with a flash-forward of Laing after that interior life has let rip.

TH: It's true to the book. The first line of Ballard's *High-Rise* is, "Later, as he sat on his balcony eating





I know the film is provocative, challenging and rebellious and it's dividing people already, but the provocation and the challenge is there in the material. Ballard knew what he was doing

the dog, Dr Robert Laing reflected on the unusual events that had taken place within this huge apartment building during the previous three months." That shot was Ben's way of honouring that great opening line, one of the best in fiction.

One really interesting conversation I had with Amy on email was about a central chapter in the book, when Laing, after a long night of surviving – there have been beatings in the corridor, with rape and theft on a grand scale – he looks in the mirror and sees his own image. There's mud and dirt and shit on his clothes, and his face is covered with sweat and grime, and he hasn't slept – he's got bloodshot eyes – and he looks at his watch and he's got to go to work. So he puts on a crisp white shirt, a new suit and picks up his briefcase and walks outside, and, in Ballard's words, the air was filled "with knives". The air is too clean and the light is too bright and it precipitates a kind of mild nervous breakdown where, as he tries to get to his car, he can only get as far as an unfilled concrete ornamental lake in the middle of the square and he starts to feel the walls of the lake rising up above him as if he's going to be consumed. It instigates such deep terror in him that he runs back, goes all the way up to the 25th floor, rips off his suit and puts on his sweaty clothes that he's been wearing all night and feels a profound sense of relief. A new truth about himself has begun to emerge. He's reassured by the odour of his clothes. He no longer believes in the construct of whoever Dr Laing is outside.

NJ: The reviews from the Toronto Film Festival were very divided: some raves, some put-downs. Has this film got a particularity to it?

TH: I know it's provocative, challenging and rebellious and it's dividing people already, but the provocation and the challenge is there in the material. Ballard knew what he was doing. He's challenging people's prejudices and their capacity to handle life. There's no redemption at

the end of *High-Rise*, no neat closure, but Ben's been really faithful to the book while putting his own stamp on it.

NJ: Given that class is at the centre of this film and seems again to be a burgeoning political and cultural concern, I wonder what your line is on what you have in common with a number of successful British actors at the moment, that you share a certain privileged background?

TH: It's a delicate line to tread because I never want to contribute to any conversation that becomes divisive or prejudicial in any direction.

NJ: But you do seem to go out of your way in some of your choices of roles to avoid the posh stereotype.

TH: I became an actor to prove I'm not that stereotype. Those labels that are easily attached to people are so superficial. But there's a lot of that about. There's justified and correct concern about equality of opportunity. The arts, and every other profession, should not be exclusive to one social grouping. I don't identify with the divisive conversation, but I can see why Ben cast me as Laing.


NJ: But how does the perception of you change when, say, you're cast as Hank Williams in *I Saw the Light*.

TH: When I was cast, a lot of people were up in arms on that forum of diplomacy and democracy called the internet. People were very concerned about a British actor playing an American icon. I saw that as irrelevant. If you're an actor it's your job to commit to playing all kinds of characters. I understand casting to type, but 'type' is much more fluid and mutable than we give people credit for. We all contain multitudes, it's just the actor's profession to play upon that. If you're a good enough actor, with enough commitment and compassion and craft, you can create a character that people believe.

I wanted to do *I Saw the Light* for a couple of reasons. To make a film about music was very inspiring. Within Mark Abraham's screenplay there were two narratives: one about the nature of performance, Hank Williams's

THE ROYAL FAMILY

Jeremy Irons as Anthony Royal, the architect who designed the tower block in *High-Rise*, with his wife Ann, played by Keeley Hawes

 **modernity.** As far as I'm concerned history kind of stops in 1990 and there are no more eras. I wanted to take those bits of the futuristic 70s and the kitsch stuff and make an alternate version of it. That was the dream. You want to see the building as quick as possible and feel the scope of it and get it out of the way. You feel the thrusting modernity of it. It's like these people are fucking and they come out and they go to work and they drive off in their Triumph Stags and they stomp about. They're kind of proto-yuppies.



Luke Evans (playing Richard Wilder): Wilder is the agitator, the one who brings up the questions, and as much as he's slightly

crazy, he has moments of pure clarity, which is an interesting thing to play. He has an animalistic feeling about him. He's passionate and driven. We had to start at the end of the film, where he just gets more deranged, crazy and bloodied. We had to shoot those end scenes in the first week. It's very difficult because you have to have an idea of what level ten is, so that you can then start backtracking and work out what level you should be in a given scene. You're constantly referring back to shots that are already done so that you know you can give it some sort of journey.



Elisabeth Moss (playing Helen Wilder): In a way she's the Virgin Mary of the building. She has been very put upon for quite a few


years and when everything in the building starts to hit the fan, so to speak, she sinks into this deep lonely depression, bunkers in and tries to avoid the whole situation. In my eyes, she's the uncorrupted innocent.

It doesn't mean that she doesn't also go a little bit mad, but she's not guilty.



Mark Tildesley (production designer): We had to get Jeremy Irons [playing architect Anthony Royal] in and out in two

weeks. So we had to destroy the swimming pool to start with. We filled it with car bits and tyres and black oil. We built a tank and sank him into it. He's buried in the dark water. It's a very beautiful shot. We're shooting in the formerly glorious Bangor Castle Leisure Centre, something Ben found with Jeremy. Half of it was built in 1973 and our story is in 1975, so it's perfect. We needed a squash court, a swimming pool and a gymnasium. There were pieces here already and it provided a big space for us to build our sets. We have two bases – one here, and one at the Stena ferry link in Belfast, where we built the foyer and penthouse. We have a penthouse lift, which was quite fun – completely glass, mirrored only. Initially we tried not to be too on the money in terms of the 70s because it ends up looking like a commercial. Inevitably, the film does go insane towards the end. So we sort of had to pace it a bit and try to pull things back and make it feel slightly like there's some sense of normality, so the impression of the way society breaks down in the flats is more powerful.

BW: It's the first time I've ever worked with a lot of sets, which was really exciting. It was amazing when we found the leisure centre because it had just been closed. It's next to a police station so it never got damaged. Then we found a supermarket and all of a sudden it was all smiling on us. Then we had Stena, the big empty ferry terminal, so it gave us two massive spaces. I just found the scale of it fantastic to work in. 


relationship with his public persona, where he was always expected to be available. And another about his private life, where he was a very different man. He was loved for being mischievous and rock and roll, but he also had a tormented private life. Mark's suggestion is that the heartbreak, pain and sadness that captured so many people's hearts in the music came from a very honest place. If an artform is authentic, people can smell it, people can root it out, they know it's coming, they know it's truthful. There was something in there I could relate to. I wasn't born in Alabama in 1923, I haven't got spina bifida, and during the course of playing Hank Williams I discovered I'm not an alcoholic – I don't have that gene, happily. The circumstances of his upbringing were completely unlike mine, but I understood him and I really related to him. I related to being on stage and feeling that unique energy of the connection between the performer and an audience and also the professional requirement to deliver even when you're in a dark place. I also felt a bizarre responsibility to commit to his truth. The rest of it was just graft and practice and changing the way I looked and sounded, the way I played the guitar, sang and spoke and not stopping until it became second nature.

My family has often asked me the same question: "Why do you have to go so far afield, to be so hard on yourself?" It's to do with trying to prove that I'm not who you think I am. If, as you say, class is an issue that's coming back, the thing I feel most passionate about is inequality. Difference is necessary. There's that Groove Armada song that goes, 'If everybody looked the same, we'd get tired of looking at each other'. We should celebrate our diversity in every facet, but there should be more equality of opportunity.

NJ: To come back to *High-Rise*, given that it's a period piece, how do its politics reflect today's situation?

TH: During the last general election, I was in Morocco doing *The Night Manager* and I stayed up all night watching the results come in. I found the intensity of the debate across the country fascinating. It relates to *High-Rise* because there was a huge amount of justified anger about inequality. I found that passion reassuring.

High-Rise is about the rebellion of breaking out from whichever floor you're positioned on in the building. Wilder, in a career-defining performance by Luke Evans, is obsessed with going higher up. On one level that's an admirable ambition, but you also have to take into account the astonishing cruelty he shows in abandoning his wife and children. You could argue that architect Anthony Royal's optimistic vision was for everyone to be happy, but it's all come down like a house of cards.

There's a debate happening now about the position of Labour in the political spectrum and what Jeremy Corbyn is doing – and everyone has an opinion about that and about the overwhelming Conservative majority and what that means for who we are at this point. The terrifying spectre of UKIP and Nigel Farage seems thankfully to have fallen away, but the same idiocy is rearing its head in America as we near the election. The expression of these terrifying opinions, the intensely debated dialogue, with so much anger from both parties, the jostling of people trying to win the argument as to which side gets to define the status quo, *High-Rise* speaks to all of that. 

 **High-Rise is released in UK cinemas on 18 March and is reviewed on page 64**



Doctor in the house: a frame from Ben Wheatley's storyboard for *High-Rise* showing Dr Laing

MAVERICK TO MAINSTREAM

J.G. Ballard's work was always laden with cinematic influences, but his own impact on film culture took rather longer to be felt, emerging gradually from the margins of the avant garde

By Roger Luckhurst

From his first stories in the 1950s, J.G. Ballard's science fiction was saturated in cinema. The stories about Vermilion Sands, a decadent, end-times desert resort of artists and chancers, flit with characters straight out of Fellini or Antonioni. There's also a touch of *Bonjour Tristesse* (1958) about it, though – dirty old David Niven on the Riviera – and this is typical of Ballard's film taste. The high was always mixed with the low; he borrowed from everyone and anyone, the channels always open.

Ballard had remained a marginal maverick for much of his career, regarded as a somewhat hopeless obsessive. His autobiographical novel *Empire of the Sun* (1984) changed all that, and Steven Spielberg's adaptation in 1987 gave Ballard a further boost. He always remained steadfastly loyal to his adaptors, even Spielberg, who perhaps symbolically cut Ballard's cameo in the crowd from the cinema version. *Empire of the Sun* seemed to explain Ballard's compulsions and repetitions in a graspable frame of war-trauma, a psyche constructed from his time interned in a prisoner-of-war camp in Shanghai. After this book, rather weirdly, Ballard risked approaching the status of national treasure.

Ballard's early writing for the pulp magazines stood out for their refusal of expansive American science fiction or space opera (Robert Heinlein was the presiding god of all that at the time, *Starship Troopers* coming out in 1959). Instead, Ballard offered a precise, intensive prose focused on what he called "inner space". The first film adaptation of one of his stories, 'Thirteen to Centaurus' (1965) for the *Out of the Unknown* TV series, turned the attention of its astronauts from stellar distances to the interior landscape of madness. His stories and early novels were often set in a heightened present, alienated and tilted towards entropic exhaustion. He was not interested in the future, he always said, but the next five minutes.

In the early 1960s, the new young editor of *New Worlds* magazine, Michael Moorcock, declared Ballard "the voice" of New Wave science fiction. The term was borrowed, of course, from that rebellious

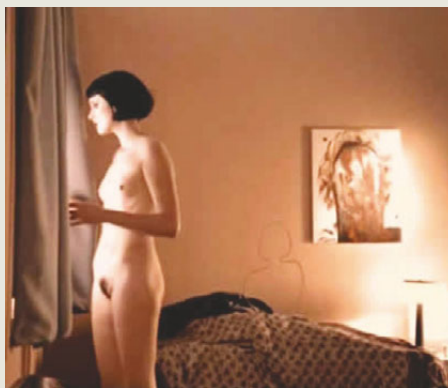


War child: Steven Spielberg's adaptation of *Empire of the Sun* (1984) brought Ballard to wider attention

generation of French writers and filmmakers then becoming international stars. When Ballard wrote strident manifestos in *New Worlds*, he denounced both realism and science fiction and pointed instead to Chris Marker's *La Jetée* (1962), a post-apocalyptic time-travel narrative teased out from stills of hyper-modern Paris. There is a continuum between Ballard's fiction about urban sprawl

and catastrophe with Godard's *Alphaville* (1965) or *Weekend* (1967), or the science-fictional tones of Alain Resnais's early work or Marker's provoking cine-essays.

Ballard was also clearly influenced by the further reaches of the avant garde: he hung out with William Burroughs when the latter was in London and toying with film-splicing (as in the mesmeric *The Cut-Ups* from 1966). Ballard also borrowed a still from Steve Dwoskin's *Alone* (1963), the masturbating woman featuring in one of Ballard's strange anti-advert collages that he published in underground journals. Ballard admired Dwoskin's *The Bathroom* (1968), and was evidently delighted his girlfriend Claire was being pursued as Dwoskin's next naked female star. The multimedia Arts Lab world in Camden was Ballard's milieu in the late 1960s; it was where he staged his exhibition of crashed cars. But typically, he also lavishly praised *Mondo Cane* (1962), that delirious collage of tasteless, depraved found and mockumentary footage. Ballard watched



Jonathan Weiss's *The Atrocity Exhibition* (2000)



it over and over, he said, and it fed into *The Atrocity Exhibition*, his most provocative experimental work, written between 1966-70.

This collection of 'condensed novels', featuring the assassination of John F. Kennedy, Vietnam horrors, Marilyn Monroe and the violent death of James Dean, was an echo chamber of the 1960s, a traumatised reflection on our emergent condition of media saturation. 'Why I Want to Fuck Ronald Reagan' recognised the arrival of a new kind of vacuous media politician. His American publisher famously pulped the first edition there, appalled by the obscenity and worried about libel. Sections of it were involved in prosecutions under the Obscene Publications Act in England. It is uncanny how closely Ballard's obsessions match the experimental work of Bruce Conner, whose key films of the time, *Report* (1967) and *Marilyn Times Five* (1973), tinkered with images of Kennedy's assassination and Monroe's body. Conner compulsively edited and re-edited versions of these pieces for years on end. Celebrity,



Tuned in: Chris Petit's *Radio On* (1979) is an echo-box of sources, including Ballard

death and the ceaseless circulation and reproduction of images – this was also the aesthetic of Andy Warhol's Factory films from the same period. I'm not sure Ballard could have seen Conner's films, which emerged from the San Francisco found-footage movement, but the parallels are instructive.

The maverick filmmaker Jonathan Weiss did eventually make a feature-length film of *The Atrocity Exhibition* (2000) using the same dense overlay of found footage and archly staged, indigestible dialogues lifted directly from the text. Like the obsessives that fill the book, Weiss had worked on this project for years in almost complete isolation from the film industry – and indeed from film itself, the traditions of which he openly disdained in his rebarbative interviews. His *Atrocity Exhibition* thus felt oddly out of time, unwilling to engage with the history of avant-garde cinema. As it fell between the cracks, Weiss continued to rail against all-comers for failing to appreciate his masterpiece.

Long before this, in 1971, Ballard appeared as himself in Harley Cokeliss's short film version of a chapter of *The Atrocity Exhibition*, called *Crash!*. Ballard looks brooding as he

drives around the Westway and environs in a bulky American car, while Gabrielle Drake (sister of singer-songwriter Nick) explores the erotic conjunction of sex and technology. This was evidently part of Ballard's researches into the car crash – and came two years before the novel *Crash*, in which he made the bold decision to name the narrator 'James Ballard'. What an avant-gardist! Yet, just to trip you

Ballard's stories were often set in a heightened present. He was not interested in the future, he said, but the next five minutes

up, in 1970 Ballard got his one and only screenwriting credit, for his treatment for Val Guest's *When Dinosaurs Ruled the Earth*. His name appeared on screen as 'J.B. Ballard'.

The 1970s is the era of lost or vanished Ballard projects on film. The producer Jeremy Thomas finally got to make Ballard's *High-Rise* with Ben Wheatley 40 years after the book was published, but in the late 1970s there had been an attempt to shoot the book with Nicolas Roeg. Roeg's fractured editing, anxious male protagonists and fascination with perverse sexuality always make him seem very Ballardian, at least at his peak in the 70s. It would have been a fascinating prospect.

The novelist and filmmaker Chris Petit was also operating in a similar psychic terrain as Ballard. *Radio On* (1979) is an echo-box of sources, including Ballard, and Petit eventually made a short film directly about Ballard in 1990. It is sometimes known under the suggestive title, *The Unmade Films of J.G. Ballard*. Petit filmed Ballard again as part of the subverted documentary, *London Orbital* (2002), one of his



Out of the Unknown episode 'Thirteen to Centaurus'

collaborations with the writer Iain Sinclair. I am always rather amused at Ballard's steadfast resistance to the Sinclair shtick of lost, vanished or fugitive London writers and fictions. Ballard's West London is full of dual carriageways, shopping malls and suburban tracts of housing. He celebrates these anonymous spaces, while Sinclair digs into the histories of specific places, conjuring ghosts. In his BFI Film Classic on the various versions of *Crash*, Sinclair evidently admires Ballard, but can't quite see beyond the loud shirts and resolutely populist tastes of the man. He won't conform to Sinclair's model of the London writer.

Of course, the greatest Ballardian of the 70s was the Canadian outsider David Cronenberg. The paradox of Cronenberg's career is that he is at his most Ballardian in his early films, and least so by the time of his one direct Ballard adaptation, *Crash*, in 1996. *Shivers*, which came out almost simultaneously with *High-Rise* in 1975, is pure Ballard: hyper-modern spaces of research institutes and apartment complexes, where uncontrollable sexual urges are directed by slithery parasites. Ballard's most enduring insight was the exploration of the violent psychopathology produced by the empty spaces of modernity itself – no longer the madness of the gothic past but the hubris of the modernist attempt to erase that primal past. Cronenberg got this Ballardian insight right, from *Crimes of the Future* (1970) to *Scanners* (1981).

Cronenberg's *Crash* was obligingly condemned as "pornography" by *Evening Standard* critic Alexander Walker, who railed against "some of the most perverted acts and theories of sexual deviance I have ever seen propagated in mainline cinema", and the film soon ended up a target of right-wing populism when the Conservative home secretary suggested local councils ban the film. Ballard was plainly delighted, and was typically loyal to Cronenberg. He beamed next to the director at Cannes, at home in the brash Riviera where he set his late novels *Cocaine Nights* (1996) and *Super-Cannes* (2000). But there is a suffocating tastefulness to the adaptation that chokes any sense of transgression from the film. The stars who lined up to appear in this 'shocker' are far too beautifully lit and composed to ever capture the stench of semen and engine coolant that suffuses the novel.

After 2000, a number of short adaptations have popped up around the world – a Portuguese version of the short story 'Low-Flying Aircraft', an American rendering of 'Minus One', a very good 30-minute TV drama, *Home* – based on 'The Enormous Room' – with Antony Sher vanishing into the infinitely expanding spaces of his suburban home. Ballard continues to inspire artists too. Tacita Dean's obsessions




Sex drive: James Spader and Holly Hunter in David Cronenberg's *Crash* (1996)

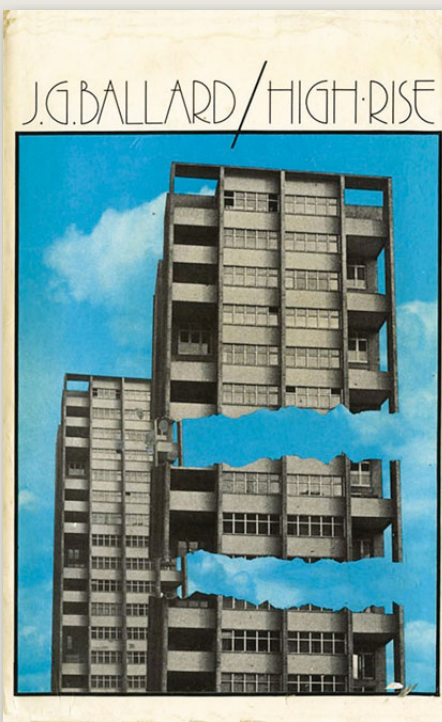
There's a suffocating tastefulness to Cronenberg's adaptation of 'Crash' that chokes any sense of transgression from the film

with abandoned futuristic houses or lone obsessives like yachtsman Donald Crowhurst produced a long exchange of letters with Ballard over the years. After Ballard died in 2009, Dean made the film *JG* (2013), which is based around her attempt to rediscover


the site of Robert Smithson's land art piece, 'Spiral Jetty'. Fans have long known that Smithson carried a copy of Ballard's 'The Voices of Time' around with him. Dean's film overlays images of the salt flats of Utah with fragments of Ballard's story.

High-Rise communicates that Wheatley and Jump are Ballard fans, but also puts their own sensibilities firmly on display. Their pumped-up pastiche of the 1970s may jar with some viewers, a continuation of their adoration of the excesses of 70s screen style. Are there any truly Ballardian filmmakers? Ballard praised David Lynch's *Blue Velvet* (1986), perfectly poised between avant garde and Hollywood narrative pleasure. He thought Elem Klimov's *Come and See* (1985) the greatest war film, and welcomed Aleksandr Sokurov's study of the Japanese emperor Hirohito, *The Sun* (2005), but these obviously speak to him for personal reasons.

I always thought Lodge Kerrigan's astonishing study of schizophrenia in *Clean, Shaven* (1993), followed by the chilly clinical framing and tones of *Claire Dolan* (1997) had something of the rigour and obsession required. That the director's last film was effectively destroyed by negative damage, and is never to be seen, adds to the Ballardian premise. Indeed, perhaps the unending lunatic project of Ilya Khrzhanovsky's *Dau*, a film about a mid-20th century Soviet physicist that has been in post-production for many years without any apparent end in sight, best captures the compulsions that would drive a properly Ballardian cinema. 



Nic Roeg was slated to direct *High-Rise* in the 70s

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SINS OF THE



A disquieting portrait of a group of priests sequestered in a Vatican safe house to atone for their sexual crimes, Pablo Larraín's 'The Club' refuses to condemn its subjects outright, offering instead a compassionate, claustrophobic study of human frailty

By Mar Diestro-Dórido

It's not been a vintage new millennium for the Catholic Church, thanks to a procession of revelations concerning child abduction, corruption and, seemingly most widespread of all, sexual abuse of minors. The last has understandably caused the loudest stir, not least because so much of it appeared to take place in plain sight, yet was consistently overlooked or ignored. Scandal, secrecy and cover-ups are meat and drink to cinema, of course, lending themselves perfectly to genre trappings or the conventions of procedural or journalistic investigation. A case in point is Alex Gibney's 2012 documentary, *Mea Maxima Culpa: Silence in the House of God*, which exposed the Church as an institution that has been holding records of priests abusing children as far back as the fourth century. Tom McCarthy's *Spotlight* was the first fictional film on the subject to open in the UK this year. Based on

a real case unearthed by the *Boston Globe*, the film focuses on a group of journalists unravelling a close-knit Bostonian society that averted its eyes from decades of child abuse committed by almost 100 priests in the area.

Most disquieting of all on the subject, and the recipient of last year's Berlin Grand Jury award, is Chilean director Pablo Larraín's *The Club*. Set in one of the Vatican 'safe' houses where five sinful members of the Church are sent on 'sick leave', Larraín's film goes straight to the heart of the matter, the perpetrators themselves, all of whom have abused their privileged, powerful position – mostly with children. It's arguably his darkest and most overtly political film to date, managing to get right under the skin of troubled individuals as he did so successfully in his internationally acclaimed debut *Tony Manero* (2008) and its follow-up set just after the Pinochet takeover in 1973, *Post Mortem* (2010). *The Club* is certainly closer to those two films in terms of its oppressive atmosphere and its lingering on the grotesque aspects of existence than to Larraín's more recent crowd-pleasing *No* (2012), which starred Gabriel García Bernal. But there is humour too, only this time of a pitch dark kind that will make the viewer squirm.

When I caught up with the director when he was promoting *The Club* at last year's BFI London Film Festival, he was quick to clarify that he wasn't abused himself, but

SHADOWLANDS
In *The Club* DP Sergio Armstrong and art director Estefanía Larraín's hazy palette of greys, blues and constant shadows ensures everything is dissipated and morally opaque. As Pablo Larraín says: 'We tried to find a space where none of what you are seeing is clear'

FATHERS



added, “I went to Catholic schools so I met many priests throughout my childhood... very good people, very venerable, very respectable. Others are today in prison or in court. I also met ones that disappeared; I don’t know where they are. This film is about those priests; it’s the club of disappeared priests.”

The disappeared – or as Larraín has it, this “involuntary, accidental family” – in *The Club* consist of four priests and one nun, two of whom are chillingly incarnated by Larraín’s regulars, Alfredo Castro and Antonia Zegers. Guarded with an iron fist and a chiselled smile by Sister Mónica, the only female character in *The Club*, they pray and eat together and train a greyhound to race, which provides their only active link with the local community. When a former altar boy loudly denounces the abuse he was subject to as a child at the hands of a new tenant, who in turn commits suicide, the full horror of all their personal stories is unleashed, galvanised by the investigations of Jesuit Father García, a figure reminiscent of Terence Stamp’s character in Pier Paolo Pasolini’s *Theorem* (1968), who asks pointed questions about the inmates’ psychological health and hints that the safe house may be closed down.

The shadowy pre-hell limbo in which these deviant messengers of the Church supposedly purge their sins and shelter from a more ‘earthly’ punishment is a house

in a remote coastal town in Chile, unsurprisingly as far away as possible from the Church’s most feared enemy, the prying, scandal-seeking gaze of the press. Fictional though the film is, *The Club*’s trigger was a photograph in a newspaper of a beautiful house in Germany, surrounded by greenery and mountains, which Larraín describes as “one of those ads for Swiss chocolate”. A Chilean priest had been sent there, accused of sexual abuse, and for the director, “it was shocking to think that after having done that, someone could be living under those conditions. The first reaction is rage and a desire to punish, but once you get past that, what you really have is compassion for these characters. Compassion is the key word in this film.”

The way Larraín stealthily gains the viewer’s compassion is one of the most stirring attributes of *The Club*, which is linked to the purposeful absence of visual references to their sins. Instead, the only insight into these sinners’ hell are their naked confessions of human frailty, or their soft-spoken denials. “This is not a film where everything is configured; it needs the viewer’s own experiences and ethical viewpoint; I could film a disturbing image, graphic, violent, or subversive if you want, but in the end, it will never be as disturbing or violent to the viewer as whatever image she/he builds in her/his own head.” Hence, each member of this

The first reaction to the priests is rage and a desire to punish, but after that, what you really have is compassion. Compassion is the key word in this film



I am not a journalist, I don't have a desire to denounce, I don't want to change anything. I'm not interested either in knowing exactly what's up with the priests

➡ special club is systematically placed face to face with their Jesuit counsellor, as in a confession, and filmed in the exact same space, using identical framing for interviewer and interviewee. There were two reasons for adopting this strategy for Larraín, as he explains: "The first one is the proximity that cinema creates when you do a close-up on a character whose acts are morally questionable. In the end, the viewer starts humanising her or him, starts feeling a sense of compassion for that character. A strange, oblique empathy arises. And the second aspect is my own memories of confession when I was a child. Priests have a thing about proximity – they like being very, very close as they speak to you, so you even know what the guy had for lunch."

It is this proximity to the characters that helps create the claustrophobia and entrapment that permeate every word, silhouette and dark corner of *The Club*, in similar fashion to Larraín's first two films, but here striking a different, particularly troublesome chord. The claustrophobia is produced by several means: by the way in which the Genesis quote that opens the film – "and God saw the light was good, and separated the light from the darkness" – gives way to a shadowy, liminal space suspended ambiguously between those two poles, to create what is in effect a haunted house; by the skilful use of oppressive silences, punctuated by religious music by the likes of Bach, Britten, Arvo Pärt and the Chilean musician Carlos Cabeza; and above all by the duration of takes. "There's a moment when the tension built up wears off and the take becomes uncomfortable because it's held for too long," Larraín says. "When it starts becoming unbearable you cut to the next take, and repeat the same dynamic."

Yet Larraín is not possessed of the same exposé spirit that drives *Spotlight* and *Mea Maxima Culpa*. "I am not a journalist, I don't have a desire to denounce, I don't want to change anything. I'm not interested either in knowing exactly what's up with them." Rather, quoting Hitchcock to support his assertion, Larraín is interested in what he sees as cinema's most fundamental quality, the power of mystery and suspense. "There isn't a yes or a no, no black and whites. There are no guilty ones and no redemption. There's no forgiveness, no purgation. Nothing gets resolved. Everything goes round in a Buñuel-esque, a Bergman-esque space where everything is blended into a religious, a mystic human paste." Such complexity and ambiguity are visually conveyed by his regular collaborators, cinematographer Sergio Armstrong and art director Estefanía Larraín's hazy palette of greys, blues and constant shadows, where everything seems dissipated and morally opaque. As Larraín says: "We tried to find a space where none of what you are seeing is clear."

BROTHERS' KEEPER
In *The Club*, directed by Pablo Larraín (above), Antonia Zegers plays Sister Mónica (below), who is responsible for looking after the exiled priests



The Club's purposefully grainy gloom has another more earthbound function, operating as "a silent protest against all those ultra high-definition images in HD. Nowadays there's an obsession with definition and resolution. People are happy to say they are filming in 4K! No, in 8K! No, in 1000K! Please. What rubbish. When people used to work with film, there's a photochemical process of revealing in a lab, in which the negative is processed and finally washed with water. That water, obviously, differs from country to country, which in practice meant that there was a difference between films made in different countries, so British, Italian, French, US films all had a certain look. We were different based on geopolitical reasons, as the water would give a different look to each film.

"Nowadays technology is practically the same everywhere. Before my film was being screened at the London Film Festival, there was a trailer, a compilation of many extracts from many different films, and they all looked really similar. It's incredible. What we need is texture. We need an identity, not for the sake of being different, but in order to give the film a voice, an aesthetic, an ethic, a narrative space." Larraín and his team used a high-definition camera with old Russian lenses made in the Soviet Union, used by the likes of Tarkovsky, to capture precisely those qualities, and convey the alien space in which these doomed figures move.

This is also a space where time seems most definitely suspended. Using day for night filters, it becomes impossible to gauge the time of day based on the light hours. There are no clocks or watches and the characters wear the same clothes throughout the whole film, perpetuating a deep sense of unease and uncertainty. It's as if there's a ticking bomb about to explode (Hitchcock again), an impression reinforced by the actors using a hushed tone of voice at all times. "This is the tone of voice used by the Church, a whisper. Nobody speaks loudly. A priest never shouts. It's all in a lower tone of voice, like something is said but it's not being said. If I stop in front of a group of 30 people and I speak loudly, everyone carries on doing whatever they want. If I speak just at the limit of what is audible, people start shushing. You have to be more concentrated in order to be able to hear a whisper."

Paradoxically, it is precisely the whispering about these hidden crimes, for what seems like centuries, which has placed the Catholic Church's darkest secrets directly in the spotlight. ☹



The Club is released in UK cinemas on 25 March, and is reviewed on page 71



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PAPER TIGER
Josh Brolin in *Hail, Caesar!*,
playing the real-life MGM
fixer Eddie Mannix, who was
notorious for keeping the
stars' unseemly private lives
out of the headlines




SWORDS AND SCANDALS

The Coen brothers' 'Hail, Caesar!' borrows liberally from the lives of cinematic legends in its playful recreation of Tinseltown's 50s heyday – but while it can be fun to try to spot the references, classic Hollywood itself was a rabbit hole that makes it impossible to tell for certain where the truth begins and ends

By Pamela Hutchinson

If you wanted to scratch the perfect surface of classic Hollywood, you would probably start with Eddie Mannix. Officially a senior MGM studio executive, Mannix was also a fixer: the man who kept the stars' unseemly private lives out of the headlines via a number of creative illegal dodges. First hired by the Schenck brothers as a bouncer for their New Jersey amusement park, Mannix subsequently brought physical heft and underworld clout to MGM after Nicholas Schenck took him with him to the studio. In California, he became Louis B. Mayer's lieutenant, holding the studio's most difficult actors in line, keeping the business ticking over, and maintaining a meticulous ledger charting the costs and profits of every film the studio made. If you know who Mannix is, and what he did, then you know some of Hollywood's guiltiest secrets.

Having been portrayed by Bob Hoskins in *Hollywoodland* (2006), an account of the murky death of George Reeves, star of the TV series *Adventures of Superman*, Mannix is now the hero of the Coen brothers' *Hail, Caesar!*, a behind-the-soundstage comedy-drama set in Hollywood in 1951. Josh Brolin plays Mannix as a man of certain if eccentric principles, a caring husband and father (unlike the real figure) wondering whether to stay in the movie business or take a cushier job in airlines, an industry that is on the up. *Hail, Caesar!* appears at first to be an immaculate simulacrum of mid-century Culver City (the area of Los Angeles that was home to MGM Studios), at least as we've seen it in the movies; but with Mannix present, we expect to see beyond the studio lights. Our enjoyment of films from this era is often sharpened by knowledge gleaned from decades of biographical revelations; if we squint we might be able to see a hint of illicit drugs, politics and sexual proclivities on the screen.

We're back at Capitol Pictures, the studio that ten years earlier sent John Turturro to the Hotel Earle to write a Wallace Beery wrestling picture, in *Barton Fink* (1991). Beery was a friend of Mannix's, in fact, and had many a distasteful reason to call on his services. He also crops up in this film (framed pictures of him loom over a conference table), one of many clues that Capitol is a stand-in for MGM. On the production slate at Capitol are one chipper musical featuring tap-dancing sailors and another starring a bathing belle à la 

'Hail, Caesar!' resists the status of a biopic or even an exposé, and reminds us that even Loretta Young wasn't Loretta Young – her first name was really Gretchen

Esther Williams, both of which would do musicals supremo Arthur Freed proud. To illustrate the former, a superbly subversive six minutes of *Hail, Caesar!* is devoted to an all-male dance troupe led by Burt Gurney (Channing Tatum mimicking Gene Kelly) performing an innuendo-spiked spoof of MGM classics *Anchors Aweigh* (1945) and *On the Town* (1949). Alden Ehrenreich plays a singing cowboy called Hobie Doyle – a cut-price Howard Keel dragged from his horse and transplanted to a society drama directed by a studio veteran (Ralph Fiennes) who might be, just maybe, the producer-director Mervyn LeRoy.

There's also a ludicrous biblical epic close to completion called *Hail, Caesar!*, which combines the luxuriant excesses of MGM's *Quo Vadis* (1951) with aspects of the studio's two adaptations of *Ben-Hur* (1925 and 1959). Capitol's *Hail, Caesar!* has a marquee star named Baird Whitlock (played beautifully by George Clooney as a handsome gullible fool) as a Roman who comes to believe in Christ. The Coens' *Hail, Caesar!*, by contrast, is about a man who reaffirms his faith in the movie business. Straddling those plot strands, Whitlock is kidnapped by a cell of disgruntled communist screenwriters (maybe Fink is one of them) who feed him finger sandwiches and dialectics before demanding a ransom from the Capitol coffers.

WINDS OF CHANGE

In 1951 MGM was a precarious place to work, even without fictional communist kidnappers. Having roared through the 1930s, the MGM lion whimpered during the war years, and by the 50s the studio was in deep trouble. Expenditure was soaring, with phalanxes of overpaid executives, and a talent pool suited to making lavish musicals rather than the *noirs* and dramas audiences favoured – and which other studios were cranking out for a fraction of the cost of a *Quo Vadis*. All of Hollywood was fighting the same challenges: the anti-trust laws, which threatened to break up the studios by separating production from distribution and exhibition; the television boom, which was hitting cinema attendance; and the attentions of the House Un-American Activities Committee – but MGM was the least nimble of the Big Eight. *Hail, Caesar!*, with its matte-painted backdrop of ancient Rome and its opportunity to slip behind the façade and show us how dumb and grimy the movie business really is, could be a film about the decline of the studio system, the demise of a civilisation built on a desert. "Hollywood is like Egypt," the veteran producer David O. Selznick told the screenwriter Ben Hecht in 1951. "Full of crumbled pyramids. It'll never come back. It'll just keep crumbling until finally the wind blows the last studio prop across the sands."

Hail, Caesar! is a movie, however, not a history book. From Mannix's first trip to the confessional to the declaration of faith at the foot of a crucifix that climaxes the film within a film, *Hail, Caesar!* is sustained by an unwavering suspension of disbelief. This Mannix isn't just management muscle, but a storyteller to join the ranks of the writers and directors on the lot. In the film's opening sequence, he bursts into a house in the hills where a Capitol actress is posing for "French postcards". Mannix's solution to the potential scandal is to create a new name for her ("I'm Mary Jo... something") and a story about a fancy-dress party ("This isn't her dirndl") on the spot. A

small bribe is enough to make the police lose interest in seeking the truth. Mannix's lie is in the service of another lie, after all: as if the starlet in question were really called 'Gloria DeLamour' in the first place.

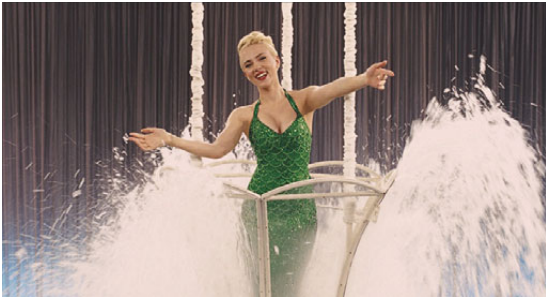
The Coens claim, and it may well be true, that they didn't spend long studying Mannix and MGM before making *Hail, Caesar!*. "We're not big on research," Joel Coen told *Variety*. "You can go down the rabbit hole really fast." The point is that classic Hollywood is a rabbit hole. The parlour game of reference-spotting in *Hail, Caesar!* reaches a stalemate when you can't see where the truth begins and ends.

Take DeeAnna Moran, the foul-mouthed Esther Williams take-off played with such relish by Scarlett Johansson. The scandal she needs Mannix to scrub for her is that she's pregnant and unmarried, just as the real actress Loretta Young was in 1935. The solution then, as in *Hail, Caesar!*, was a *coup de théâtre* that pushed Mannix and MGM head of publicity Howard Strickling to the limits of their respective talents. In order to live a publicly acceptable lie, Young fled to England to give birth and then, months later in California, adopted her own baby. According to E.J. Fleming's *The Fixers: Eddie Mannix, Howard Strickling and the MGM Publicity Machine* (2004), the studio paid off "reporters, doctors, nurses, police, county records staff, priests, nuns, steamship employees, railroad workers" in order to separate and then reunite mother and child.

So far, so mind-boggling. If you hope to map DeeAnna's fictional scandal on to that one, though, you'll hit a wrinkle. The father of Young's baby was Clark Gable, whose name is sprinkled throughout *Hail, Caesar!*, perhaps as a decoy tactic, mostly in relation to a gay sex scandal that dogs Whitlock. But the fling that produces DeeAnna's pregnancy is reminiscent of another MGM affair, the fragile romance between Judy Garland and Vincente Minnelli, protégée and director. With these biographical deflections *Hail, Caesar!* resists the status of biopic, or even exposé, and reminds us that even Loretta Young wasn't Loretta Young – her first name was Gretchen. Just as Judy Garland wasn't Judy Garland but Frances Gumm, a reinvention she replayed for the cameras in *A Star Is Born* (1954) when Esther Blodgett became Vicki Lester, in a hit film that itself was a remake of a remake.

In *Hail, Caesar!* DeeAnna's adoption ruse hinges on the co-operation of small-time lawyer Joseph Silverman (played by Jonah Hill), who offers the service of "professional personhood". He is legally a person – whereas all DeeAnna is is a star: a name and a story. She's Mary Jo Something, and this isn't her dirndl.

Thanks to Mannix, in *Hail, Caesar!* the barrier between reality and cinematic artifice slips. When Mannix drives through the night to find a starlet in a compromised position (in a scenario straight out of 1946's *The Big Sleep*, or even 1998's *The Big Lebowski*), or takes DeeAnna downtown to meet Silverman and sign away her baby, the hard-boiled dialogue and pools of light in the darkness take us on a detour into *noir* territory. If Mannix were a movie character that's the world he would inhabit, the cheap and morally grey flipside to MGM's prestigious epics and musicals. But Mannix is also a true believer in Hollywood and he is flanked by some fellow travellers who keep reality, and the fall of the studio system, at bay.

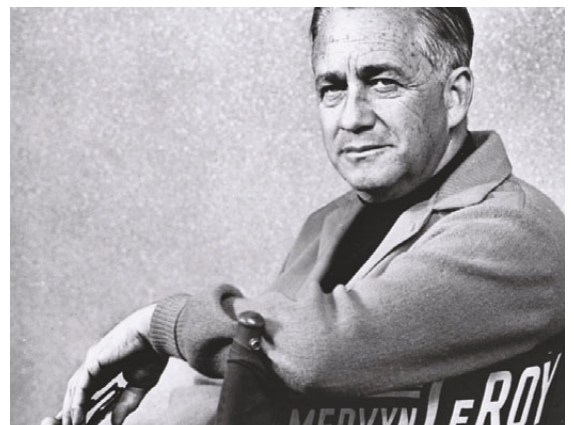


SMOKE AND MIRRORS
Scarlett Johansson's DeeAnna Moran (left) is a take-off of Hollywood actress Esther Williams (below left), while Tilda Swinton (below right) plays a pair of gossip columnist twins, Thora and Thessaly Thacker, loosely inspired by real-life journalists Hedda Hopper and Louella Parsons (right)



WHEN IN ROME
In a film within the film, marquee actor Baird Whitlock (George Clooney, left) plays a Roman who comes to believe in Christ, in a biblical epic with echoes of Mervyn LeRoy's 1951 spectacle *Quo Vadis* (above)

THE IMITATION GAME
Ralph Fiennes (right) plays studio executive Laurence Laurentz, who shares more than a passing resemblance to veteran producer-director Mervyn LeRoy (far right)



PHOTOEST INC. (3)/BFI NATIONAL ARCHIVE (4)

When Mannix drops by to see the editor C.C. Calhoun (Frances McDormand), who is cutting *Merrily We Dance*, the society drama featuring Hobie Doyle, we see how a character can merge with a movie. The inspiration for C.C. could be any one of Hollywood's legion of female editors: perhaps Margaret Booth, Blanche Sewell or Dede Allen. As C.C. flicks the switches on her Moviola, the editing pace of *Hail, Caesar!* picks up. Cut-cut-cut, just as she would do it. As the reels turn, we see that her work has turned a potential dud into a snappy pre-Code style sparkler. C.C. has saved the movie by putting herself into her work – literally, as her scarf gets pulled into the machine and threatens to mangle her into the rough cut, before Mannix rescues her.

The reward for bowing down before the altar of Hollywood is made clear when Hobie Doyle goes on a night out with a Carmen Miranda type called Carlotta Valdez (an audacious piece of namecraft, straight out of *Vertigo*). It's a studio-arranged date, the sort considered the enemy of true romance, designed to refine each star's image and provide some innocent distraction for the gossip columns. In *Hail, Caesar!* those columns are written by a formidable pair of twins called Thora and Thessaly Thacker (played by Tilda Swinton): duelling journalists Louella Parsons and Hedda Hopper distilled into a two-headed monster. But nobody told Hobie and Carlotta that Hollywood is a sham and they were meant to have a seedy off-screen identity. They perform their acts for each other, smile for the cameras, and before we know it they are duetting over dinner. What girl could resist a lasso made of spaghetti? Following this picture-perfect date, Doyle is led into becoming a hero, the role he has been rehearsing all his life, sharp-shooting for the cameras. In front of a woozy rear-projection seascape, he follows the macguffin money right to the communists' lair. There's a reason that Mannix confided in this dope – he's a believer too.

The communists who kidnap Baird call themselves 'The Future' and explain to him that the laws of economics can predict what will happen next – just as the real-life Mannix must have foreseen the fall of MGM in his legendary ledger of profits and losses. But in 1951, MGM was not yet in full decline. It was in denial, hanging on to the contract system and the idea of a central producer, even if that man was left-leaning newbie Dore Schary, rather than a charismatic Meyer or Thalberg. And it was holding out against the future, just like Mannix batting away digs about TV from the recruitment agent, or smacking a work ethic back into Baird when he spouts a communist line about bread and circuses. "You're going to do it because the picture has worth," Mannix tells Baird between slaps, "and you have worth if you serve the picture." After all, if a star isn't really a person, then when they aren't in a picture they might not exist at all.




IT'S A FIX!
MGM's Eddie Mannix (left, with his boss Louis B. Mayer) was played by Bob Hoskins in *Hollywoodland* (below) in 2006 before Josh Brolin (with Clooney, bottom) took on the role for the Coens



HELLO SAILOR
A subversive six minutes of *Hail, Caesar!* is devoted to an all-male dance troupe led by Channing Tatum (below left), performing a spoof of MGM classics, including 1949's *On the Town* (below)

We might have expected *Hail, Caesar!* to pull away the curtain of Hollywood and expose its lies. Instead, this film shows us how sturdy the sham really is. Just as Thessaly and Thora fight each other for scoops, the spectres of communism and homosexuality cancel each other out, leaving Capitol's gleaming faces untarnished. Mannix's stars are now working for him to root out problems rather than cause them – just as, he marvels, his children's problems at school fix themselves without his intervention. The Capitol Mannix has built is, at least for now, a self-sustaining illusion.

While the studio system that once sustained Hollywood is now ancient history, most of the Big Eight studios have survived in some form, so this civilisation has not yet collapsed into the sands. Capitalism, or Capitollism, lives to fight another day. And what's next for MGM in 2016? This summer, in collaboration with Paramount, the studio is bringing out a new adaptation of *Ben-Hur*. 



***Hail, Caesar!* is released in UK cinemas on 4 March and is reviewed on page 77**

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HEYUGUYS

"A SLEEK AND HEAD-SPINNING THRILLER"

INDIEWIRE

"TERRIFICALLY SUSPENSEFUL"



EMPIRE

MATTHIAS SCHOENAERTS DIANE KRUGER DISORDER

A FILM BY ALICE WINOCOUR

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WRITTEN BY STEPHEN VAUGHAN AND PAUL HARTMAN PRODUCED BY JAMES HANCOCK AND PAUL HARTMAN DIRECTED BY ALICE WINOCOUR
CASTING BY LUCY WATSON COSTUME DESIGNER JANE HARRISON HAIR AND MAKEUP BY JANE HARRISON PRODUCTION DESIGNER JANE HARRISON
EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS SAMUEL LEECHES AND ALICE WINOCOUR PRODUCED BY JANE HARRISON AND PAUL HARTMAN WRITTEN BY STEPHEN VAUGHAN AND PAUL HARTMAN
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THE HERE AFTER

A FILM BY MAGNUS VON HORN

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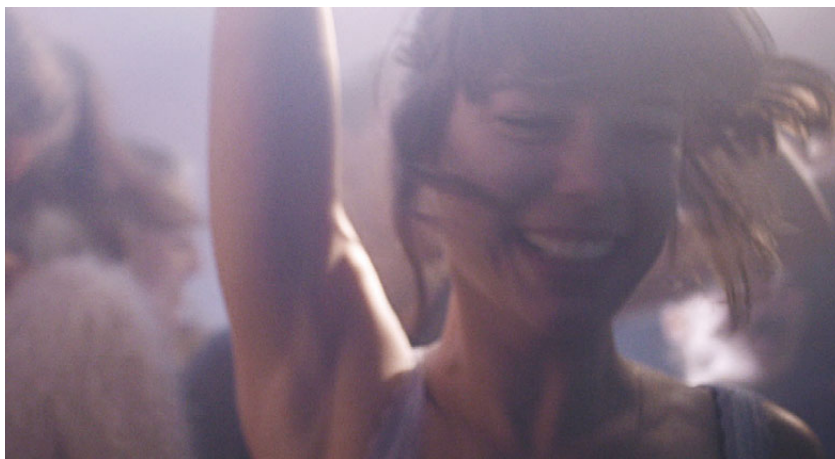
IN CINEMAS MARCH 11



NIGHT MOVES

Shot in a single bravura 134-minute take, Sebastian Schipper's 'Victoria' tells the tale of a young Spanish woman on a night out in Berlin who finds herself being roped into a bank robbery, in a film whose dizzying momentum never sacrifices the nuances of character

By Jonathan Romney



PHOTOGRAPH BY GETTY IMAGES (3)



As director Sebastian Schipper says, his latest work *Victoria* was intended to be a film, not a stunt. Let's call it a feat, then – an audacious example of athletic, on-the-move filmmaking in the commando mode. *Victoria* is a kinetic, involving narrative about a young woman whose character, not least her sheer nerve, emerges in the course of one night in Berlin. What makes the film so audacious is that this night's events have been compressed into 134 minutes of action, all seamlessly shot in a single take.

Victoria kicks off in a nightclub at around 4am, where the young Spanish heroine (Laia Costa) is seen on the thumping dancefloor before heading out on to the empty street. There *Victoria* is accosted by a seemingly friendly, though implacably insistent crew of young men, headed by Sonne (Frederick Lau). They offer to show her “the real Berlin”, and wisely or not, *Victoria* decides to go along with them. They spend the small hours walking, talking, drinking and hanging out on a rooftop, before it's time for *Victoria* to start her early shift at a café. But just when the night's adventures seem to be over, they're just starting; the lads are planning a bank robbery and enlist *Victoria* as an accomplice. What eventually happens will reveal her psychological make-up as much more complex and forceful than you initially suppose.

Schipper's film holds you rapt – even if you're not watching with cinephile eyes to work out how the camera is moving, and whether or not there are any cuts. *Victoria* was genuinely shot in a single take, the third of three complete filmed run-throughs (in fact, Schipper had a contingency plan which would have allowed for jump cuts if necessary). The film is scripted – it's credited to the director and two other writers – but the written framework allowed for improvisation by the actors, responding to outlines for individual scenes.

Victoria does not ostentatiously foreground the complex organisation that went into its making; the film is clearly loose enough to accommodate a certain amount of contingency. But things are not quite that cut and dried. Certain episodes are contracted so that they create an effect of real time rather than actually being co-extensive with it, like the gang's return to the club later in the film. And while some locations are real (a hotel, a café), others were built specially in empty spaces (the bank, the club, an apartment). Schipper's team, including director of photography Sturla Brandth Grøvlen and production designer Uli Friedrichs, create the impression of a much larger, more labyrinthine cityscape than the small segment of Berlin's Mitte district that the film actually uses.

Victoria also feels as fresh as it does because you're seeing new, or at least unfamiliar, talent flexing its muscles with real brio – not least, a small, tightly unified cast who create nuanced, unpredictable characters even while breathlessly staying in pace with the action. As for



Schipper, this is his fourth feature but, he says, the first that has really let him experiment. As an actor, he appeared in Tom Tykwer's *Run Lola Run* (1998) – another female-centred experiment with time and narrative, but altogether the slick novelty movie that *Victoria* decidedly is not. I spoke to him in London in October.

Jonathan Romney: Since *Victoria*'s Berlin premiere last year, you've talked a lot about how you made it. Has that given you further insight into the film, or into why you made it?

Sebastian Schipper: What do I know now about the film that I didn't when I was doing it? Time. I didn't realise how crazy time is. We can see, we can smell, we can hear, we can touch, we can taste, but we don't have a taste for time – and maybe that's because it would tell us when we're going to die. We can't deal with that. I have a feeling if you try to corner time, it's just going to get more crazy. We did corner time – everything you see happened in two hours, 14 minutes. I can't rationalise that.

JR: As a long-take film, *Victoria* doesn't come across like, say, Alejandro González Iñárritu's *Birdman* [2014], which has amazing tricks of synchronisation, things happening in exactly the right spot at the right moment. You create more of a sense of chance and looseness.

SS: [Berlin Film Festival director] Dieter Kosslick came to me and said, “Sebastian, you have to tell me – did you edit?” I said, “No Dieter, we didn't.” He said, “A man came to me and said, ‘I have information that there are three cuts in the film.’” Which I thought was so funny – for the first time in my life, there's some conspiracy thing. All the tricks and perfection [of *Birdman*], I love all that. This is not a project against other projects. It's more like I want to put something on the menu that's not there yet. So there's the *Ocean's Eleven* burger – love it. There's the *Heat* steak – love it. There's the *Dog Day Afternoon* chicken breasts – I love all these dishes. I thought, “I want to do a heist movie, but I don't want to redo those movies, because it would be second-rate.”

PRESSURE DROP
To facilitate the technically challenging task of shooting *Victoria* in a single take, director Sebastian Schipper (above) allowed his cast, including Laia Costa in the title role and André Henicke as Andi (left), to improvise around the script to allow for greater naturalism and to help take pressure off their performances

JR: Why a one-take film in the first place?

SS: I had a daydream about robbing a bank. I was at my desk writing a paranoia thriller for five years – so my mind wandered off and I thought, “What else can I do with my life?” One of the things that film does is to pretend, “This really happens”. I would never have done the heist movie without the one take. I wanted to be as close as possible to doing a story about someone being the driver – someone like me, but it then turned out to be Victoria. I sometimes steal Francis Coppola’s wonderful line about *Apocalypse Now* [1979] actually being Vietnam – I say, “Victoria’s not a movie about a bank robbery – it is a bank robbery.”

JR: Did you leave room for accidents? When people walk past and talk to the characters, are they real passers-by?

SS: The people that talk to them are our people. I had to stop a Russian couple interfering when one guy has a panic attack. They’d had a couple of vodkas – fair enough, it was Sunday morning – and they wanted to help him. I was saying, “What are you doing on my set?” and then they got a little angry, so I realised I had to be friendly.

JR: What if the action had gone more slowly during the shoot – would you have ended up with a much longer film?

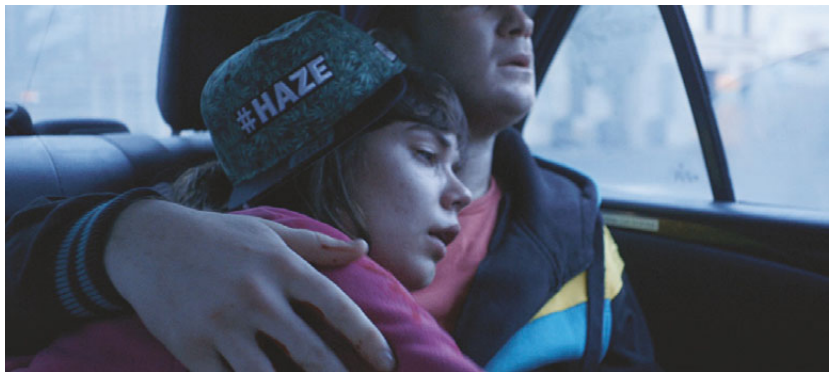
SS: It was a possibility that I chose, because I realised that if I pushed the actors too hard, the performances would not be good. For example, when Victoria plays piano, and in the scene afterwards, I told Laia, “Take your time, tell some stories.” I realised that if this became a four-hour film, it would create a problem – but I knew that most of all, this has to become a film and not a stunt.

JR: You also play with space. It feels as if we’re moving all around Berlin, but in fact the action all happens within a very tight area of the Mitte district.

SS: It was totally crammed into a very interesting part of the city. Friedrichstrasse is the crazy shopping street. We were on the cheap side of that, it’s cut in half by Checkpoint Charlie – the former East side is now rich, where you spend all the money, and the former West side is where we shot the film. There’s nothing around there, except if you know where the *Taz* [Tageszeitung] is, the German left-wing newspaper – and [publisher Axel] Springer is also on that street.

JR: At the start, Victoria is dancing in a club. By the end, she’ll have become like an opera heroine, she’ll have known extremes of human experience – terror, love and death. This doesn’t happen to most people in such short periods.

SS: There are moments when I decided to take away the sound and play music, and I think these moments work like a montage. When they go to the club later in the film, it doesn’t feel like, “Then they went dancing for



SPACE ODYSSEY
The film cleverly gives the impression that the characters (Laia Costa’s Victoria and Frederick Lau’s Sonne, above; and Sonne with Franz Rogowski’s Boxer, below) are moving through a much larger cityscape than the small segment of the Mitte district the film was actually shot in

three minutes.” It feels like they are in the club for an hour and really taking the place apart.

JR: Do men and women see Victoria’s experience differently?

SS: It depends on the people. In the US they think she’s going to get raped. But then some other people say, “No, it happened to me when I was travelling in Europe, you hang out with people and you do stuff that you wouldn’t do otherwise.” I just read something by a woman writing about Victoria – it made me realise Victoria isn’t a victim, and she isn’t bad. She is a pretty unique female character. She does pretty drastic things towards the end of the film, and she gets away with it.


JR: How did you choose cast and crew, given that you had to know for sure that everyone would be up to the challenge?

SS: There was no way of making sure. I just looked for people I trusted, and that I wouldn’t grow tired of watching. I saw Laia in Barcelona, and also Freddie was there, who plays Sonne. I had them do a long improvisation in my hotel room, like they’d just robbed a jeweller’s and it went wrong and they were devastated, and they start to fight for the first time – and they did it. [Snaps fingers] I was mesmerised.

JR: The film represents an amazing feat of athleticism by your DP Sturla Brandth Grøvlen, who’s performing as much as everyone else.

SS: For him – and the people in front of the camera – it was most important that we created an environment where we said, “There are no mistakes. Don’t be afraid, don’t be frustrated – if something happens, it happens for a reason.” It’s almost like a group meditation: we all have to be right now, right here. We found this attitude that I call the ‘war photographer’: “Don’t anticipate, you don’t know anything, you just watch.” Otherwise, he would have gone crazy.

JR: Seemingly, the script structure is less about specific timing or specific lines, more about setting up a narrative and letting actors improvise.

SS: They were improvising, but we also rehearsed. For improvisation you need a lot of preparation. It’s like music – free jazz is super-intellectual, it has a ton of rules you have to follow. We didn’t have a ton of rules, but they knew very precisely what was coming next. In the café when Boxer and Sonne fight, I’m not micro-managing the lines. I said, “Go – don’t hit each other, but fight. And don’t perform like you’re fighting, I want you guys to fight. I don’t want you to say a lot, but what you say, you mean. The words aren’t important.” I might not get control of all the lines, but I get a fight that’s worth filming. 



Victoria is released in UK cinemas

on 1 April and is reviewed on page 92

There’s the ‘Ocean’s Eleven’ burger. There’s the ‘Heat’ steak. There’s the ‘Dog Day Afternoon’ chicken breasts. I love these dishes. But I want to put something new on the menu





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KICKING AGAINST THE PRICKS: THE DISRUPTIVE LIFE OF ALAN CLARKE

Renowned for his assaults on bourgeois values and his fierce portraits of marginalised communities, the late director actually had a far wider range than he has been given credit for. His oeuvre, made largely for television, has traditionally been hard to track down but, as a forthcoming BFI retrospective reveals, his films were as inventive and uncompromising as any ever made in Britain

By Michael Brooke

'The only problem with Alan, he spoiled you – it's downhill all the way afterwards. I thought all directors were brilliant and sexy like that. What a disappointment.'

(Janine Duvitski, actress)

Alan Clarke (1935-90) has hardly been forgotten since his shockingly untimely death from cancer at the age of 55 – he's already had more than one major retrospective in the UK alone (Edinburgh, 1998; London, 2002) and two eponymous, beautifully complementary books (Richard Kelly's oral memoir, Dave Rolinson's critical overview). More trivially, the existence of Bafta's Alan Clarke Award for Outstanding Creative Contribution to Television means that his name at least gets a high-profile annual airing. However, until 2016 there was a major obstacle to full Clarke appreciation: the difficulty of getting access to much of his work, at least beyond the above retrospectives and logistically and financially challenging archival viewing sessions.

Unsurprisingly, it's been much easier to see the three cinema features, *Scum* (1979), *Billy the Kid and the Green Baize Vampire* (1985) and *Rita, Sue and Bob Too!* (1987), although none ranks among his best work. A similarly accessible television trio of *Made in Britain* (1982), *Elephant* (1988) and *The Firm* (1989) does at least show him at full creative tilt, but they still barely scratch the surface: the BFI's upcoming box-set spans two full decades and 30 television works in total (20 running over an hour apiece), revealing not just a far wider range of subjects than the too easy caricature of Clarke as an ultra-masculine social realist might suggest, but also a confidence and consistency that dates from the dawn of his career.

His seven surviving contributions (out of ten) to Associated-Rediffusion's *Half-Hour Story* series of self-contained plays bear this out. From the start (1967's

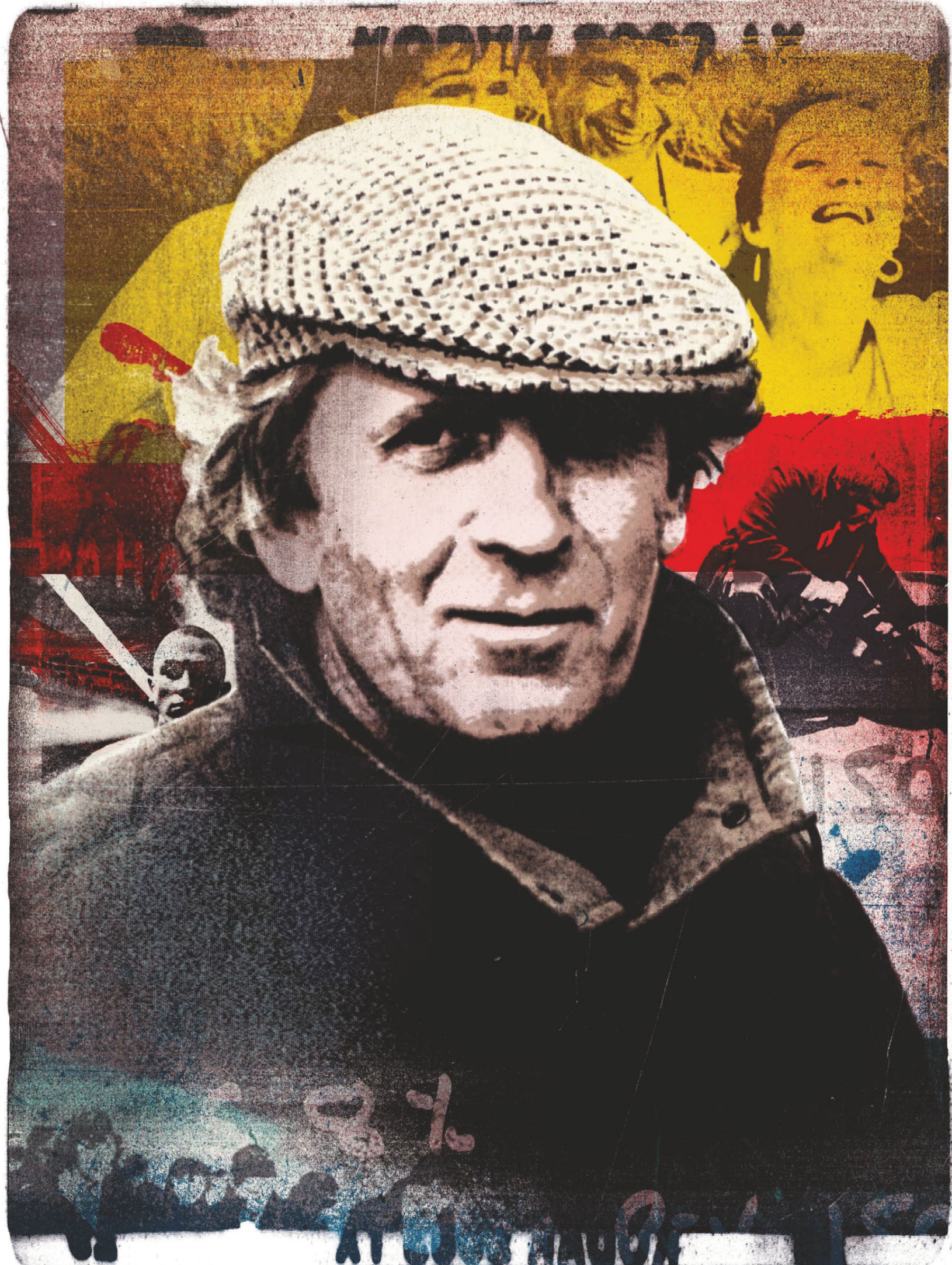
Shelter was the first to be broadcast, though the second to be filmed) Clarke devised a distinctive visual language based around long takes and well-judged close-ups, often to let us scrutinise his actors' reactions as well as their actions. Most are male-female two-handers, although *The Gentleman Caller* (1967) anticipates Clarke's more notorious work, as the highly intelligent and articulate working-class Clack (Mike Pratt) debates whether to damage more than just the dignity of a hapless council official (George Cole at his most weaselly), whom he regards as his inferior in every respect bar financial and social status. Even in this first year, his producer and discoverer Stella Richman described Clarke's direction as "masterly".

The *politique des auteurs* is surprisingly rarely applied to television directors, and exceptions such as Mike Leigh, Ken Loach and Ken Russell subsequently produced hefty big-screen filmographies, as though their small-screen work was merely a stepping stone to future glories. This is itself a contentious claim, since Loach was most influential with *Cathy Come Home* (1966), Leigh most culturally iconic with *Abigail's Party* (1977) and Russell most feverishly experimental with *The Debussy Film* (1965), but the notion that television must invariably be 'smaller' than cinema is completely demolished by the force of Clarke's astonishing body of work. And if he doesn't qualify for full-blown auteur status – and, what's more, in the original *Cahiers* sense of a contract director turning studio assignments into deeply personal statements – it's hard to imagine who does.



'Dissent & Disruption: The Complete Alan Clarke' will screen at BFI Southbank in London from 28 March – 30 April. The BFI will also release two DVD box-sets and a complete Blu-ray box-set of Clarke's BBC work







AUTHORITY

'It was as if the slightest hint of any person or any institution exercising any authority whatsoever was not just an invitation for Alan to behave anarchically – it was as though he almost felt it was his duty, that he would be remiss if he didn't create some mayhem.'
(Tony Garnett, producer)

Clarke was not a man who took kindly to notions of hierarchy and deference. In some ways it's surprising that he spent so much of his career at the BBC, even after the fall-out over the original TV version of *Scum* (1977), which was banned and not transmitted until 1991. As the many contributors to Richard Kelly's marvellous oral memoir *Alan Clarke* (Faber, 1998) fondly and sometimes gleefully attest, it wasn't just his productions that were censured: he was banned from innumerable pubs and clubs (including more than one BBC facility) and during production of *Diane* (1975) he was arrested for indecent exposure, to do with a naked dance in a pub in cahoots with his regular writer Roy Minton.

Clarke was born in Wallasey in the Wirral in 1935, the son of an insurance salesman (who spent much of Clarke's childhood fighting in World War II) and a customs official at Liverpool docks. Obviously bright, he attended the local grammar school (winning a Latin prize), and after National Service in Hong Kong he emigrated to Canada. While recovering from a gold-mining injury – yes, you read that right – he heard about a course in radio and television arts at Toronto's Ryerson Institute of Technology (1958–61), where he discovered his calling.

He returned home in 1961, moved to London in 1962 and got a job as an assistant floor manager at ATV, learning the production ropes while directing plays with the highly regarded amateur Questors Theatre in Ealing. He could have used this as a springboard to the Royal Shakespeare Company (his talent had already been spotted there), but TV remained his first love. He

got his directing break in 1967 courtesy of producer Stella Richman, who defied the old-school-tie tradition at Associated-Rediffusion both to hire him in the first place and to sneak him into a half-hour slot as director without management approval. Within two years he had a BBC contract, and the vast majority of his later work was made there, despite the occasional nervousness with which it was regarded by the higher-ups. As well as the furore over *Scum*, there was internal concern about *Elephant* and *The Firm*, with the latter being slightly trimmed prior to broadcast (the BFI has recently reinstated these cuts).

But Clarke's instinctive desire to challenge and – if possible – undermine authority ran through his work. There are plausible Clarke surrogates in *The Gentleman Caller*, *Scum* (more the articulate anarchist Archer than the thuggish 'daddy' Carlin), *Baal* (1982) and *Made in Britain*, in which debutant Tim Roth's skinhead Trevor defies all suggestions that it might help him if he toed the line occasionally. Clarke was also fascinated by the mechanisms of institutionalised power, whether Sandhurst military academy (*Sovereign's Company*, 1970), the church (*The Hallelujah Handshake*, 1970), the courts (*To Encourage the Others*, 1972), an old people's home (*A Follower for Emily*, 1974), a psychiatric hospital (*Funny Farm*, 1975), the British and Soviet governments (the unfinished *Bukovsky*, 1977; *Nina*, 1978), multinational corporations (*Beloved Enemy*, 1981), the British presence in Northern Ireland (*Psy-Warriors*, 1981; *Contact*, 1985; and, more obliquely, *Elephant*) and of course various young offender institutions (*Scum*, *Made in Britain*).

TARGET PRACTICE
Alan Clarke's disdain for authority was reflected in his work, which took aim at (clockwise from top left) a young offender institution in *Scum* (1979); the church in *The Hallelujah Handshake* (1970); and bourgeois morality in *Baal* (1982), starring David Bowie

THE UNDESIRABLES

'People said to Alan, 'How dare you make a film about a racist?' But if you don't make films about these people, does that mean they suddenly don't exist – that we can all go home? What are you supposed to do, make picture-postcard films?' (Tim Roth, actor)

No other British filmmaker, not even Ken Loach, more consistently stood up for the rights of the dispossessed than Clarke. He did so not in a self-consciously ideological way (his personal politics were instinctively left, but he was more anarchist than Marxist) but by getting up close and all too personal. He forged a particularly productive partnership with miner's son Roy Minton, writer of *The Gentleman Caller*, *Goodnight Albert* (1968), *Stand by Your Screen* (1968), *Horace* (1972), *Funny Farm*, *Fast Hands* (1976) and both versions of *Scum*.

Goodnight Albert is an excellent early example of the Minton-Clarke partnership, a two-hander between a grandmother (Gwen Nelson) and grandson (Victor Henry) that was praised even at the time for the unusual level of sympathy shown towards the kind of people who were normally treated as comic relief. It's also a notably clear-eyed view of the gulf between daily reality and the illusory fantasy of Carnaby Street and swinging London: the number of northerners who became Beatles (or acclaimed TV directors, come to that) was statistically minuscule.

Many of Clarke's protagonists are profoundly alienated from conventional society, whether the fantasist of *The Hallelujah Handshake*, the two lead characters of *Horace* (a man with the mental age of a child, a lonely schoolboy with ambitions to run away from home); the borstal inmates of *Scum*; the teenage drug addicts of *Christine* (1987); and of course Derek Bentley in *To Encourage the Others*, a dramatisation of the notorious real-life court case from the 1950s in which the 19-year-old was tried and hanged for the murder of a policeman even though his accomplice pulled the trigger on the gun. George Costigan, who played the male title role in *Rita, Sue and Bob Too!*, recalled filming in and around Bradford's notorious Buttershaw estate from which the film's writer Andrea Dunbar herself hailed: "The incest rate was through the roof, the deprivation was appalling, there was nothing to do." Talking of incest, the portrayal of the father in *Diane* is much more matter-of-fact than condemnatory, for all the sympathy we naturally feel towards his daughter-victim.

Even Clarke's more outwardly 'classical' work betrays similar interests in the marginalised. Alexander Solzhenitsyn's *The Love Girl and the Innocent* (filmed by Clarke in 1973) is set in a Soviet labour camp, while Bertolt Brecht's *Baal* sets the title character (David Bowie) on a deliberate collision course

with the stuffy moralism of Bavaria in 1912. But Margaret Thatcher's election as prime minister in 1979 turned Clarke's interest in those abandoned by society into a central focus – the fact that her rise coincided with the banning and reshooting of *Scum* created a kind of solidarity, as he was now definitively associated with 'dangerous' subjects and people, the 'danger' being that Clarke was prepared to give them an unmediated voice on mainstream television. Hence his sympathetic treatment of racist skinheads (*Made in Britain*), teenage heroin addicts (*Christine*) and impoverished communities (*Rita, Sue and Bob Too!*; *Road*) – although he stopped short of overtly championing the football hooligans in *The Firm*, as his attitude towards them was practically the only thing he had in common with Thatcher (albeit for very different reasons: Clarke was a life-long football fan).

BAND OF OUTSIDERS
Tim Roth as Trevor, the rebel without a cause in *Made in Britain* (1982); and Siobhan Finneran, George Costigan and Michelle Holmes in *Rita, Sue and Bob Too!* (1987)



MEN AND WOMEN

'All that machismo, there's a certain attractiveness to it, and I think that certain women find it very sexy. But ultimately, it's a selfish existence and it affects other people around you.' (Gary Oldman, actor)

Clarke is often characterised as an ultra-masculine director, not unfairly when you consider which of his productions has been easiest to see over the years. Certainly the likes of *Scum*, *Made in Britain* and *The Firm* confrontationally and unflinchingly depict extremes of male behaviour both singly and in groups in ways scarcely matched by any other director, with their lead performances by Ray Winstone, Tim Roth and Gary Oldman (the first two of whom made their debuts for Clarke) still ranking as career high points. By any yardstick, Oldman's estate agent-cum-football hooligan Bexy is a repulsive piece of work, but he's such a live wire that you can't take your eyes off him: emerging from the house that he's just shown off to would-be purchasers with the send-off, "If this house don't sell itself, I'm a monkey's uncle," he launches into a full-blown chimpanzee impression as soon as he's out of their sight and earshot. (This was a spontaneous improvisation on Oldman's part, but perfectly in tune with the Clarke universe.)

And yet one of the revelations of this year's revival is that Clarke was also an uncommonly sensitive director of women. Take Janine Duvitski and Vicky Murdock, in the title roles of *Diane* and *Christine*. Both, like Winstone and Roth before them, were complete newcomers faced with considerable acting challenges, not least because *Diane* and *Christine* are so passive – one's trapped in an incestuous relationship with her father, the other lives only for her next fix. While their performances were daringly underplayed, Clarke was just as comfortable with much

more decisive female protagonists: Geraldine Moffat's Stella, from his 1968 TV film of the same name, very much her own woman as she negotiates a terminal split from a no-hoper boyfriend, or Eleanor Bron's dissident in *Nina* (1978), torn between love for her Russian homeland but compelled to follow her lover to London, only to find that life with him (and without her son, effectively held hostage by the Soviet authorities) quickly becomes unbearable. Later, in *Road* (1987), Lesley Sharp delivers a virtuoso eight-minute single-take monologue that begins as a diatribe against her unemployed husband and expands outwards into a forensic analysis of just how they've become regarded as "human waste" purely through accident of birth, her verbal sense of hopelessness counterpointed by the coiled-spring energy of its delivery as she walks furiously around the more visibly deprived parts of Easington in County Durham.

Clarke's work was also uncomfortably direct in portraying relationships between men and women. This started with the early *Half Hour Story* series, which often revolved around cat-and-mouse games of seduction, reconciliation and uncomfortably intimate questioning, and continued through to *The Firm* 22 years later. In particular, a once-censored but now reinstated scene reveals that Bexy's wife (Lesley Manville) is potentially just as violent as he is, even if she's better at keeping it under wraps for the sake of propriety. (The knowledge that Oldman and Manville were married at the time and that she was pregnant with their son makes this moment even more intense.)

HUSBANDS AND WIVES
Lesley Manville and Gary Oldman in *The Firm* (1989), Frank Mills and Janine Duvitski in *Diane* (1975), and Eleanor Bron in *Nina* (1978)



BODY LANGUAGE

'No one has ever grasped the central metaphor of cramped existence in walking as well as Alan Clarke.' (David Thomson in 'The New Biographical Dictionary of Film')



WALKING THE WALK
Clarke's fascination with the way in which character is revealed through movement can be seen in *Road* (1987), starring Neil Dudgeon as Brink (top); and *Christine* (1987), his portrait of heroin addiction, starring Vicky Murdock (above)

Clarke's early television work prized close-ups of faces over bodies, although even then he was aware of the potency of a particular pose – look at the way Colin Blakely menacingly semi-slouches in medium shot in *Shelter*, the oldest surviving Clarke production (it was his second). Indeed, all the early *Half Hour Story* episodes double as studies in body language in ways that their original authors might not have envisaged. The evidence no longer survives, but in his very first TV production, *A Man Inside* (1967), Clarke's camera viewpoint mirrored that of Freddie Jones's lustful protagonist as he scrutinised the midriff of a young colleague in a short skirt to such an extent that producer Stella Richman allegedly told him, "I think that's enough cunt for the moment, Alan."

By the time of *The Hallelujah Handshake* in 1970, Clarke had started shooting on location on 16mm film, allowing far more scrutiny of the way his characters walked over substantial distances – in a comparatively early sequence, the protagonist David Williams (Tony Calvin) walks with the church minister Geoff (Jeremy Wilkin), and Clarke has them expressing as much in silent (albeit hymn-scored) long shot as they do in the following dialogue scene, with the nervous, jittery Williams remaining fractionally behind his spiritual superior, almost bowing in involuntary supplication as he tries to ingratiate himself in the hope of earning a promotion. The entire play is full of shots like this (including a two-minute reverse track down a corridor), often held for longer than might have seemed necessary if the piece was entirely dialogue-driven.

Similar sequences can be found in almost all Clarke's subsequent work. Everyone remembers the sequence in *Scum* whose mid-point sees Phil Daniels being felled by a heavily loaded sock and which ends with the victorious Carlin (Ray Winstone) proclaiming, "I'm the daddy now!", but the bulk of the running time simply comprises Winstone walking, looking round corners, hunting his prey. (This is especially true of the cinema version, which stretches the sequence's second half by nearly two dialogue-free minutes.) Tim Roth was reputedly cast as the lead in *Made in Britain* despite having no acting experience because Clarke had been watching him from a window overlooking Soho Square as he had a mild (and, from Clarke's viewpoint, silent) altercation with a policeman just before his formal audition.

In *Christine*, the walking has become the be-all and end-all of the protagonist's existence as she goes from house to house in search of fix after fix, facing downwards to focus obsessively on the propulsive forward motion: despite her youth, it's already the only thing that keeps her going.

It's hard to believe that *Road* began life as a stage production – a BBC electrician's strike forced it out of the studio, and Clarke couldn't have been happier. (A telling anecdote from Kelly's book: actress Mossie Smith recalled that nobody in Easington thought it was the least bit unusual to have women wandering round the streets talking to themselves; one passer-by said, "Oh, we're used to it, everyone was like that during the [miners'] strike.")

CLARKOVSKY

'I told him that had he been called Clarkovsky rather than plain old Alan Clarke, he would have an international reputation. And he was amused, but didn't seem to think that critical acclaim really mattered.' (Mark Shivas, producer)



For all Clarke's own professed disdain, one of the remarkable things about him is the way that it's so easy to draw parallels between his ostensibly populist work and that of the most rarefied art-movie practitioners. He's known to have become a fan of Michelangelo Antonioni and John Cassavetes while training in Toronto in the early 1960s, and both seem to have influenced him: Antonioni for his use of space and the positioning of people within those spaces; and Cassavetes for his raw, seemingly unvarnished studies of people not normally given screen time.


Richard Kelly's book makes a persuasive case for Clarke as the BBC's own Robert Bresson (particularly the near-minimalist sparseness of later works like *Christine*, *Contact* and *Elephant*), and Clarke's fellow BBC director Christopher Morahan likened his fondness for long, static takes to "an Ozu kind of style... a rigidity and a classicism". Gus Van Sant's tendency to mention Clarke and Béla Tarr in the same sentence flags up similarities with the Hungarian director's work, particularly his love of lengthy shots of people walking in silence apart from the repetitive rhythms of their footfalls. Van Sant named his 2003

Palme d'Or winner *Elephant* in homage to Clarke; other aficionados include Clio Barnard (whose 2010 *The Arbor* draws heavily on both the source text and the setting of *Rita*, *Sue and Bob Too!*), Paul Greengrass, Harmony Korine and Shane Meadows. When Phil Davis, Gary Oldman and Tim Roth made their directorial debuts with, respectively, *I.D.* (1994), *Nil by Mouth* (1997) and *The War Zone* (1998), their mentor's influence could hardly have been clearer, or more cheerfully acknowledged.

Clarke's stylistic signature was apparent from the start. He had a reputation for meticulous pre-planning, combining lengthy takes with perfectly judged cuts and very little camera movement. By the mid-1970s, the takes had become even longer, and Clarke took full advantage of lightweight 16mm cameras and their greater mobility. He was so impressed with Chris Menges's camerawork on Stephen Frears's *Walter* (1982) that he hired both him and the then new Steadicam

BUT IS IT ART?
(Clockwise from top left)
Road (1987), *Elephant* (1988)
and *Contact* (1985) share a
rigorously sparse style

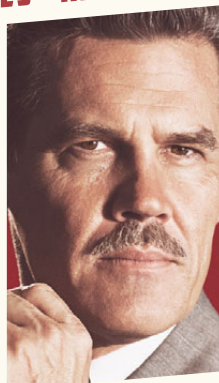
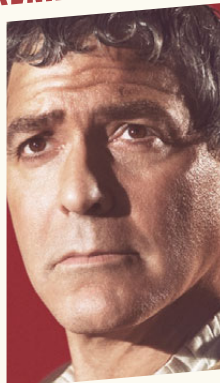
for *Made in Britain* the following year, and the latter became an essential tool for the rest of his career. *Christine*, *Road* and *Elephant* in particular are inconceivable without the long, sinuous tracking shots that by then had become the chief visual indicator of Clarke's work. He had long been fascinated by the spaces between what was normally regarded as dramatically significant, and the Steadicam let him exploit this to the full – but never in a flamboyantly showy way.

That said, he was sometimes criticised for self-indulgence, most notoriously on *Love for Lydia* (1977), an ITV drama series based on H.E. Bates's novel and produced by the writer's son Richard. Clarke planned the first episode to be dominated by wide shots, the final episode to be shot in close-up, and each successive episode moving visibly towards that ultimate goal. Ironically, it was Richard Bates who was fired over this (ITV controller Cyril Bennett complained that he couldn't see the actors' faces in early episodes), although Clarke resigned soon afterwards. Ultimately, his methods were more suited to one-off television dramas, in which form and content could be truly indivisible. 

"OUTRAGEOUSLY FUNNY"

DAVID SEXTON, THE EVENING STANDARD

JOSH BROLIN GEORGE CLOONEY ALDEN EHRENREICH RALPH FIENNES JONAH HILL SCARLETT JOHANSSON FRANCES McDORMAND TILDA SWINTON CHANNING TATUM



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THE DROWNED WORLD

Turning his attention from the northern desert landscape he explored so vividly in *'Nostalgia for the Light'* to the remote archipelagos of Western Patagonia, the veteran Chilean documentary filmmaker Patricio Guzmán offers another dazzling poetic meditation on history, ethnography, culture and political violence in *'The Pearl Button'*

By Nick Bradshaw

Doubtless no one sets out to become their nation's post-genocidal conscience; and so it is that in his latter years Patricio Guzmán, who across four decades of filmmaking has never let rest the memory of Chile's bloodily suppressed dalliance with democratic socialism since first documenting it in his monumental *The Battle of Chile* (1975-79), has emerged as perhaps the cinema's foremost star gazer and philosopher of the elements. Not that this marks any kind of self-reinvention; rather, Guzmán's thirst for metaphors and prisms through which to glean all possible meaning from his country's agonies is such that he has remade and remoulded his artform to accommodate these dynamic, poetic allusions and leaps of reference.

Nostalgia for the Light (2010) perused the vast Atacama Desert in Chile's northern hinterlands, and its bone-white telescopic observatories that peer deep into distant, ancient space-time, before pivoting to regard traces of the desert's forgotten nitrate mines and Pinochet-era concentration camps, following mothers of the disappeared sifting the sands for bone fragments of their loved ones. The past is the very fabric of our universe; ignore it as we might, we live and breathe it, the movie

PHOTOGRAPHY BY MATT CARRIGNEY IMAGES

argued. Though not as autobiographical as Rithy Panh's recent *The Missing Picture* (2013), which used clay figurines to depict his childhood memories of Khmer Rouge genocide, *Nostalgia* also saw Guzmán dust off the innocent passions of his boyhood – astronomy, Jules Verne adventure stories – as already trailed in his shorter works *Mon Jules Verne* (2005) and *Robinson Crusoe Island* (1999).

Such imaginative odysseys are compounded in *The Pearl Button*, which, turning from the desert to the sea, begins as an essay on Chile's standoffish relationship with both its watery southern coastline and the tribespeople who used to inhabit it. In the most voiceover-heavy section of the film, Guzmán muses on the advent of water on our planet (by comet from space); shows us the labyrinthine coastline of western Patagonia with its remarkable fringe of archipelagos; and turns up the sound on the creaks and groans of spectacular glaciers as he sails past them: here the film has the tenor and hue of a natural-history encyclopaedia. Guzmán also brings in the artist Emma Mani to unfurl a huge cardboard map of Chile, a rugged sliver that runs the length of a studio the size of a small hangar. It's a novel sight, he asserts: his country is such a ribbon that at school its map was cut into three sections for display in the classroom.

Then we open up to ethnography, the five indigenous tribes of Tierra del Fuego and the mysteries of their maritime hunter-gatherer organisation ("naked before nature," as Guzmán puts it to me) in this inhospitable terrain. Guzmán interviews three of the last survivors and gets them to share words of their dying vocabulary; one of them testifies that their seafaring skills have died out because the Chilean navy will no longer let them use the water. Guzmán shows us the German anthropologist Martin Gusinde's luminous, magical photos of their painted-body initiation rites from a century ago, and relates their hope and belief that after death their souls might become stars in the cosmos. Then, as we watch documentary film footage of the natives in the 1930s shot by the Italian missionary Alberto María De Agostini, Guzmán recounts the genocide by deprivation, disease and bounty hunting that decimated their ranks in the space of a bare few decades in the late-19th century. (By coincidence Rithy Panh has also turned to archive filmmaking with his latest, *France Is Our Mother Country*, a retake on French colonialism in Cambodia.) And to underscore the film's turn from Vernian exploration to Pocahontas-like despoilment, Guzmán also tells the legend of one Fuegian, Jemmy Button, who for the price of one pearl button (hence his name, and the film's) was removed to Victorian England, groomed as an ambassador of Western values for a year and then returned home, where in Guzmán's telling he was left a shell of a man.

Guzmán ponders the sea in his hometown that swept away a boyhood friend, and the fear of its power and menace, and finally we come to the inevitable concluding chapter of his essay, the sea as cemetery for the victims of Pinochet's torturers: there's a dispassionate re-enactment of how they must have bagged and tied bodies around railway sleepers to be ejected from helicopter over the ocean (deduced from one badly tied body that came loose and resurfaced), and *vérité* underwater footage of one of the many such sleepers that divers have lately been turning up on the sea floor outside Santiago. And encrusted in one of these rusty railway sleepers, another button from the clothing of another victim, dormant but not silent, an emblem of an expropriated life.



ON THE WATERFRONT

A button for a life: water as a channel of life and death, embodiment of and conduit to the past. More formally ambitious – and looser – than *Nostalgia for the Light*, *The Pearl Button* has a dazzling fluidity. I'm not the first interviewer to begin with a question about his starting point – how does a film like this take shape? Which plate did you spin first? It's a conversational gambit, of course (the film hardly hides its building blocks), which is not to say I expect a ten-minute answer that recaps much of the film's storyline plus Guzmán's own speculations on how the Fuegians might originally have arrived from Asia – surely via the less icy Antarctic rather than up and over the Bering Straits. ("Of course, the archaeologists are very orthodox and rigid," he says with a shrug.) "It's quite extraordinary," he enthuses several times – speaking through an interpreter – of a range of discoveries and wonders.

But short story: water, buttons, death. "It starts with space and the sky, and the arrival of water to the earth and the oceans, with meteors and comets – and this, of course, gave birth to the water-land of the south of Chile. And it finishes with the discovery of an enormous quasar, full of water. It's a dramatic construction,

SONG OF THE SEA

In *The Pearl Button*, Patricio Guzmán (opposite) explores the grim legacy of Pinochet's regime through the watery graves of his opponents (top), and charts the history (middle) and seagoing culture (bottom) of Chile's southern tribes

using real events and celestial bodies which are also real. But I'm making the connections – there's an imaginative aspect to complete the fable.”

If the film doesn't have the emotional gut-punch of *Nostalgia for the Light*, that's perhaps partly a function of its free-form structure, but also of its casting: notwithstanding the three last-of-their-kind native witnesses, there are no live characters here who embody the tensions and tragedy of the story like the young astronomer Valentina Rodríguez, daughter of two disappeared parents, in *Nostalgia*. “[In *The Pearl Button*] I felt that my own thoughts were more powerful and more accurate than some of the relatives – children and parents – of these people who had died,” Guzmán tells me. “I interviewed all of them, but I felt that my voice needed to be there.”

What the film does have is a righteous anger at the depredations of the powerful and the usual litany of atrocity, impunity and false memory; at “the germs of civilisation” and Chileans' alienation from their landscape and history. There's no treatment of economics, no mention of money, but when Guzmán pulls back despairingly into deep-space conjecture – “Has the same thing happened on other planets? Have the strongest people always dominated, everywhere?” he asks – the film feels like an expression of its time, a *J'accuse* in an era of crisis capitalism and technological materialism.

I've never felt I had a huge vision to communicate in a militant manner or that what I was doing was vital. On the contrary, I like a bit of humour

VANISHING POINT
In the film Guzmán explores the history of the five indigenous tribes of Tierra del Fuego, showing German anthropologist Martin Gusinde's luminous photos of their painted-body initiation rites from a century ago (bottom), and interviewing one of the last survivors (below)



“We're in a bad moment; we're passing through a bad time,” he says. “It's a curve that rises and falls, and it's going down at the moment. But of course most of the time it's up and down like a wave, and the likelihood is we'll go back up – there is no other alternative; otherwise humanity will disappear. And I don't think it is our destiny to disappear... yet. Not quite so quickly. Maybe in another thousand years, but a better time has to come.”

“In all areas, the politicians have fallen, and we have to think up new ways of government, which will be a complete change. Like in television, which is falling; on the other hand the internet is rising; [television] has been replaced. There will be a break, which could be dangerous and difficult, but I really think it will happen. And in a way that's quite extraordinary. It's always been like that, the history of man.”

I recall an amusing spiel from Guzmán about his cap-in-hand pilgrimage around the world's television funders, trying to interest them in his unlikely treatment for *Nostalgia*, and no one buying. After the film's success, at least *The Pearl Button* was less of a mountain to climb. Guzmán's wife and producer Renate Sachse steps in: “A lot of people who had previously rejected it [she specifies the CNC, the French Film Council] eventually, in various conversations, to our great pleasure – and of course it didn't cost them a penny – agreed they had made a big mistake. When we presented the new one they were much more receptive and we managed to get finance more easily. And we have international co-productions with Spain and Chile for the first time.”

Guzmán's homeland [he has lived in Europe since 1973] hadn't contributed funding to his films in the two decades since the fall of the Pinochet regime, perhaps a sign of the limits of its rapprochement with truth. As Guzmán's *Chile, Obstinate Memory* (1997) showed, though, fear is less obdurate than memory, and younger Chileans want to know what was done to their country and forebears. Again like Rithy Panh, whose Bophana Audiovisual Resource Center in Cambodia serves to honour remembrance as well as cinema, Guzmán has ambitions to set up a Chilean archive “where my films will be accessible for people, especially for students, in the next few years. We're working on that. It's slow, but there's a possibility.”

My last question: what inspired him to forge this heterodox path in cinema, mixing poetics and politics? What still inspires him?

“At the beginning of my career,” he says, “I was not very political; I only thought about filming. What made me enter [politics] was to find the Allende government, and it was such an extraordinary explosion that I just found myself immersed. But I never was a Marxist expert or anything; I haven't read the classical texts; I've never been an activist in any political party. But sometimes, suddenly, you see things clearly: where your country is and what is happening. So my naive aspects and my reality combined: and of course I've been playing with that balance ever since. But I've never felt I had a huge vision to communicate in a militant manner or that what I was doing was vital. On the contrary, I like a little bit of humour. The poetic aspects do dominate, for me. Luckily!”



The Pearl Button is released in UK cinemas on 18 March and is reviewed on page 87



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PREVIEW

SPIRIT OF INDEPENDENCE

Admired by Werner Herzog among many others, Filipino director Kidlat Tahimik's films combine playfulness with political critique

By Aaron Cutler

The films of revered Filipino director Kidlat Tahimik radiate gentleness and especially love – for a people, for a culture, for family – but also contain sharp political critique. They manage to reconcile bitterness, sweetness, irony and openness with a sense of humour often conveyed by his own offscreen voice (and recurring onscreen presence) over the course of five features and several shorts. Now 73 years old and still an active filmmaker and teacher, he has inspired generations of artists within the Philippines and abroad.

Tahimik is native to Baguio City, a tourist town known for its community of indigenous artists and its American military bases. He was born in 1942 as Eric de Guia, but adopted what he calls his “noncolonial name” while making his first feature, *Perfumed Nightmare* (1977), a 16mm hybrid of documentary and fiction. The persona of Kidlat Tahimik – Tagalog words for ‘quiet lightning’ – is a plucky fellow whom his maker has continued to play both in front of the camera and behind it. In *Perfumed Nightmare* and in subsequent films, the character navigates the identities of worker and artisan, representing what the director considers a Philippine struggle between serving a master and being one's own.

Over time, Tahimik has become one of the symbols of Third Cinema, and an inspiration for other directors as a figure of unwavering independence. Joshua Oppenheimer cites *Perfumed Nightmare* as an influence; Werner Herzog is a fan. Raya Martin has argued that Tahimik's *Why Is Yellow the Middle of the Rainbow?* (1994) is the greatest Filipino film ever made. Ben Rivers has celebrated Tahimik as “unique and utterly indigenius”, adopting a term used by the artist himself. (A Filipino tribal leader, in speaking with the filmmaker, would mispronounce the word “indigenous”, inadvertently crafting a neologism whose fusion of independence, spirituality and earthiness has served as an ideal for Tahimik's practice.)

‘Kidlat’ first appears in *Perfumed Nightmare* as a skinny village youth who earns his living driving a jitney (a vehicle recycled from abandoned US military jeeps). He transports impoverished locals and wealthy foreigners across the town's lone bridge, built by his grandfather. His father, he tells us, was a fellow driver who died fighting for Philippine independence. Kidlat himself dreams of giving up his jitney to become an astronaut in Cape Canaveral.

The film begins as mock travelogue. While Kidlat rides around the village, discussing its inhabitants in voiceover, documentary footage features farmers, merchants, churchgoers and

the filmmaker's own mother going about their routines. Satirical moments are smuggled in: for instance, the frequent presence in Kidlat's jitney of an idol of the village's patron saint, San Marcos, is a nod to American sympathiser and Philippine dictator Ferdinand.

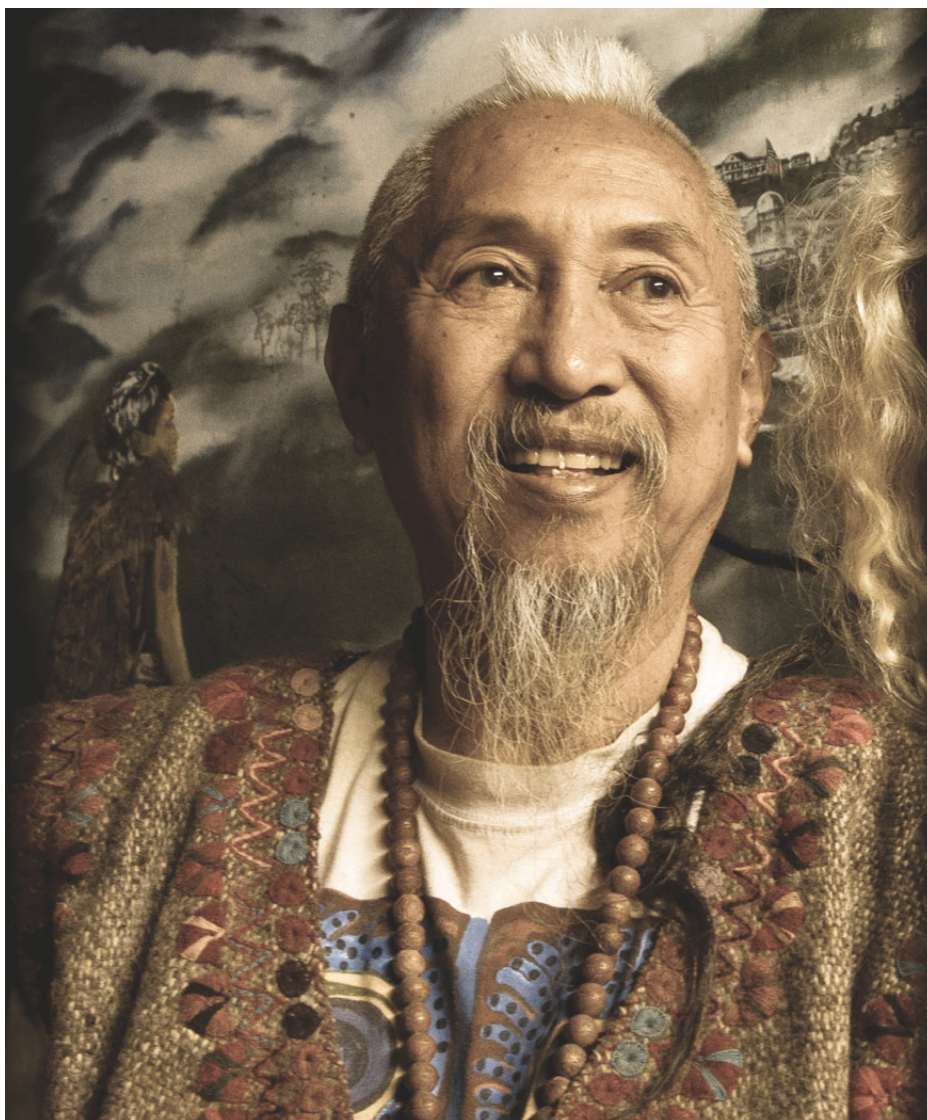
Another idol appears in Kidlat's life: American bubble-gum baron Joe, who offers to take Kidlat to Paris to stock chewing gum machines. Our wide-eyed ‘guest worker’ is first seduced by, then gradually disillusioned with, the trappings of First World progress. While the film's Philippine scenes contain people furnishing goods for their community, its European scenes show portraits of isolated people buying industrialised products and unable to inhabit the towering structures that they themselves build.

The Europeans' sadness deepens when they learn that Kidlat has built his own jeep, and his fellow villagers their own lives – a trend that Kidlat knows to be reversing with Filipinos going

abroad and his government replacing bamboo trees with highways. In a surreal sequence, he gathers strength to blow down hollow icons of Western culture, then huffs and puffs his way in a self-made aircraft back to his village. He gives up his dreams of space travel. “I am Kidlat Tahimik,” he declares towards film's end. “I choose my vehicle. I choose my bridge.”

Earlier, Tahimik had been a theatre major at the University of the Philippines. He followed his undergraduate period by studying at the University of Pennsylvania's Wharton School of Economics, possessed of the notion that his developing country needed businesspeople more than artists. He eventually sought funds to return to playwriting through a commission to make Philippine variants of the official Olympic mascot for the 1972 Munich games. The subsequent Israeli hostage crisis, though, left him stranded in Germany with 12,000 toy dachshunds.

Perfumed Nightmare was made in a way that



Indigenius: Kidlat Tahimik's films are marked by bitterness, sweetness, irony, openness and humour

has characterised all of Tahimik's films. He has never used a shooting script. Instead, he films images that he believes might be useful and edits them together in intuitive fashion in a process that he has called "listening to one's *duende* [inner spirit]". He casts himself and his loved ones for practical reasons: they are affordable and help him discuss global issues through personal stories.

He followed *Perfumed Nightmare* with two Philippines-set features. The lighthearted *Who Invented the Yo-Yo? Who Invented the Moon Buggy?* (1979) is a sequel in which Kidlat develops a space programme with the help of his village's children, and in which the answers to both questions are revealed to be Filipinos. The tragicomic *Turumba* (1981) – Tahimik's only feature in which he does not appear – reworks the director's Munich experiences with residents of his father's village in a tale of Filipinos whose lives are changed when a German woman's visit to their town to buy artisanal toys coincides with a period of religious celebration.

Tahimik chose not to make any films in the decade following *Turumba* in order to raise his children. During this time, Ferdinand Marcos's rule ended and the Philippines transitioned to democracy. Tahimik's sons were adolescents when they witnessed their first elections. *Why Is Yellow the Middle of the Rainbow?* (1994), his subsequent feature and a chronicle bound up with that moment, shows the simultaneous developments of a family and of a nation.

As with his earlier films, Tahimik narrates. The tone is far more ruminative than his previous three features, its progression less straightforward. Archive footage is interwoven with family scenes, resulting in a dense web of moments that expresses the confusion of being Filipino – a citizen of a disparate group of islands, previously ruled by Spaniards and by Americans, with a number of conflicting legacies.

For Tahimik, the American occupation continues to resonate. It officially ended when he was a child, yet endures through the presence of functioning, environmental waste-spewing military bases in his hometown. A remembered family trip to Monument Valley leads him to compare the Filipino situation to that of the oft-conquered 'indios' depicted as villains in older Hollywood films.

The film offers acts of peaceful resistance. Among them are protests and performances staged by Baguio artists, including Tahimik himself as he dons a G-string and holds forth a bamboo camera. Images also appear from *Memories of Overdevelopment*, an abandoned film project in which Tahimik plays Enrique of Malacca, slave to Ferdinand Magellan during the circumnavigation of the globe cut short by the Portuguese explorer's death. Tahimik believes that Enrique's comprehension of a language spoken by Filipino islanders towards journey's end might mean he finished the trip that Magellan wasn't able to.

Words taped above Tahimik's editing flatbed read, "Language is the perfect instrument of Empire." This phrase, coined by the Spanish Renaissance-era scholar Antonio de Nebrija, recurs throughout several of *Why is Yellow's* late scenes, as Tahimik grapples with his footage as his sons



Political spectrum: *Why Is Yellow the Middle of the Rainbow?*

keep him awake. Unable to come up with an ending to the film, Tahimik's family members help him discover it through language – more specifically, through casting away dominant Western storytelling modes in favour of finding a film language that is intrinsically Baguio.

"The genius of the indigenous culture is still within us," Tahimik claimed in 2010 to the younger Filipino filmmaker Khavn de la Cruz. "We just have to recognise it and let it flow out." Over time, he has come to regard Enrique of Malacca as an important symbol – an indigenous slave and highly skilled woodcarver whom Tahimik believes to have been the spiritual leader of Magellan's voyage. Enrique returns in Tahimik's most recent feature, which premiered at last year's Berlinale: *Balikbayan #1 Memories of Overdevelopment Redux III*. The title's first word (referring to Enrique) is a Tagalog term for someone who has gone abroad to work, and returned home; its last phrase refers to the latest iteration of the Enrique project, which began towards the end of the 1970s.

For several years, he presented his footage as a 33-minute showreel, which appears in its entirety interspersed throughout the new film. Its


For Tahimik, the US occupation continues to resonate. It officially ended when he was a child, yet endures through its military bases




Balikbayan

glistening 16mm images show a younger, G-string-clad Tahimik as Enrique moving from a Chinese merchant's home to a European court to the ship captained by Magellan (played by an Estonian actor). The filmmaker narrates action and explains how the finished film will look and sound.

Balikbayan's other main strand is shot on video. In it, a present-day Tahimik plays a shamanic woodcarver from the Philippines' Ifugao province racing through forest to converse with fellow rural artists. The filmmaker's son Kawayan – a painter whose complexion makes him look more Caucasian than Malay – plays a contemporary explorer resembling the older project's Magellan. He walks with a photo of Tahimik in hand, giving the impression of one reincarnated figure seeking another nearly five centuries after their parting.

The two beings eventually find each other and dance together. Following the film's world premiere, Tahimik created a re-edited version (*Redux IV*). He has given no indication of ceasing filmmaking, yet has also left open what he might do next. His eternally playful and poetic approach can be summed up in a moment that occurs after *Balikbayan's* reunion scene. A simple title card appears: "The End?" And then, on that note, a new pathway appears, as a fresh chapter containing new spirits begins. 

 Kidlat Tahimik will screen several of his films at the Essay Film Festival in London, from March 17-24. See www.essayfilmfestival.com



Perfumed Nightmare

PLINK! PRRT! PLONG!



Art of noise: *Paris nous appartient* revolves around the search for a missing tape of music

Jacques Rivette's 1961 debut, *Paris nous appartient*, demonstrates the late director's masterly orchestration of sound and music

By Sam Davies

"Have you heard his last thing?"

"The tape made at Terry's?"

"Yes... Music of the apocalypse. *Plink! Prrrt! Plong!*"

So runs a conversation early in Jacques Rivette's first feature, *Paris nous appartient* (1961). The scene is a party of boho intellectuals, actors, musicians and students, made maudlin by the recent suicide (or murder?) of Juan, a Spanish guitar player and political radical. The party breaks up as one of the attendees, American journalist and exile Philip Kaufman, the worse for drink, faces off with the host.

It becomes clear, though not immediately – nothing is clear immediately in Rivette's films – that *Paris nous appartient* is a film in search of a soundtrack. It has one of its own – a clamorous, sharp-edged modernist score, composed by Philippe Arthuys, of which more later. But Juan's final improvisation was meant for a production of Shakespeare's *Pericles*, directed by Gérard. It was "just what I wanted," he complains to Anne, our protagonist, interrupting rehearsals of a beach scene to mourn its loss. "Never mind the wind, the sea. If I had my music..." Drafted into the production and under Gérard's spell, Anne spends much of the film in pursuit of the tape, chasing Juan's friends, lovers and associates for leads on its whereabouts.

Anne's search for Juan's tape is oddly prophetic – an uncanny flash-forward through the next few decades of popular music in the way that it foreshadows all kinds of lost tapes, bootleg and *samizdat* circulations of out-takes and live shows. Dylan's 1967 woodshedding with The Band in Woodstock was so widely bootlegged it ended up released officially in 1974 as *The Basement Tapes*; Dylan's authorised 'bootleg' series has now reached double figures. Prince's *Black Album*, Slum Village's *Fantastic, Vol. 1*, Q-Tip's *Kamaal The Abstract* were all shelved for years, while Neil Young's mid-70s sessions for an album to be called *Homegrown* have still never been heard.

The missing tape in 'Paris nous appartient' anticipates a certain neurosis about the nature of recorded sound



Céline and Julie Go Boating

But Juan's tape also anticipates a certain neurosis about the nature of recorded sound. The hysteric, believed Freud, suffers from reminiscences, and the endless repeat plays afforded by modern technology are a double-edged prospect: a pleasure that can become an obsession or a haunting. It's significant too that the missing tape doesn't just prefigure the recordings that loop and whirr through Alan J. Pakula's *Klute* (1971), Sidney Lumet's *The Anderson Tapes* (1971), and Francis Ford Coppola's *The Conversation* (1971). It may not make a visual fetish of the recording and playback gear but the film plugs into the same currents of paranoia, surveillance, secrets and conspiracies, with Juan, Gérard and Kaufman all apparently targets for an international plot to revive Nazism. "Those we think are powerful are puppets," Kaufman tells Anne, "the real masters rule in secret."

Rivette pointedly avoided billing himself as director on his films, preferring to deflect all its auteurist connotations. Instead, he is credited with the *mise en scène*: the organisation of objects in space, and sound design often feels more natural to him than music. In *Paris* scenes of the characters walking its pavements use overdubbed footsteps to claustrophobic effect. In *Céline and Julie Go Boating* (1975) during the pair's initial cat-and-mouse *dérive* through Paris, he cuts back and forth between them using directly recorded sound: as a result the background ambience is discontinuous, creating mildly disorientating jump-cuts in the sonic field. Perhaps this marks a lack of interest in music – theatre, Rivette's great *idée fixe*, not tending to be soundtracked as heavily as film.

But Rivette's musical reticence, a reluctance to telegraph the emotional tenor of a scene or instruct the viewer with musical cues, makes it all the more effective when used. When a rare burst of music accompanies the montage of Pascale Ogier fut-fut-ing around Paris on her cyclomoteur, glaring at all the lion statues as if she wants to pick a fight with them, in 1981's *Le Pont du nord*, it conveys her absolute absorption all the more strongly. In *Céline and Julie* what little music there is generally arises from within the drama – and, as in the sequence in which Julie fills in for Céline's magician's act on stage with her own spectacularly amateur take on cabaret *chanson*, it is more about performance, impersonation and play than the music itself.

But *Paris nous appartient* does in fact have a score, composed by Philip Arthuys. Borrowing from the *noir* trope of an opening credits sequence in which the camera roams the city streets, his music announces itself with a two-minute overture which splits the difference between the jagged orchestrations of Varese or Bartók and shadings of the jazz – cool, oblique, improvised – that informed the *nouvelle vague*. (In 1958, as Rivette began work on *Paris*, Miles Davis had just visited the city in December 1957, to record an essentially improvised series of cues for Louis Malle's *Lift to the Scaffold*. Was this example of a visiting musician improvising a film score at the back of Rivette's mind as he devised *Paris nous appartient*?). Arthuys's music is carefully rationed through the film, and attached to particular kinds of scenes, such as any motion, travel or transition through the city. It also accompanies almost every appearance by the American émigré and paranoiac Philip Kaufman: he is the galvanizing character, giving Anne cryptic warnings about the all-encompassing conspiracy into which she is falling. The leitmotif of struggling director Gérard, forever waiting on a score, is not musical but the monotonous chiming of a clock – signifying what? Time running out? The remorseless onward turning of concealed cogs and machinery?

Anne does eventually find Juan's lost reel of apocalyptic guitar improvisation, this taut thread by which the fate of Gérard's production of *Pericles* seems to hang. Arriving at Terry's flat one night, Anne finds music already playing – but not the exotic sitar *raga* which has previously been heard at Terry's, nor the apocalyptic, avant-garde *Plink! Prrr! Plong!* promised by that gossiping partygoer. Instead Juan's last session captured some lyrical but meandering Spanish guitar. Could it be the same Spanish sketches that a guitarist was picking his way through in the background of that very first party scene, tying the narrative into an even more perplexing knot? Juan's tape has turned out to be a classic macguffin, even if, unlike the briefcase which is finally opened in Robert Aldrich's *Kiss Me Deadly* (1955), it turns out to be a damp squib. Like many such lost documents, on discovery Juan's tape cannot fill in the outlined space which imagination, hope and hype have created for it, but this is pure Rivette: an absence or enigma at the heart of his film which the audience has apparently written itself. 📍

PRIMAL SCREEN THE WORLD OF SILENT CINEMA

The recent restoration of a little seen 1928 feature by René Clair reveals a silent masterpiece



By Pamela Hutchinson

Among the restored treasures on display in Paris at *Toute la Mémoire du Monde* in February, one film seemed to justify the festival's existence by itself. René Clair's ingenious late silent *Two Timid Souls* (*Les Deux Timides*, 1928) harks back to an earlier age of film comedy, reworking the styles of Max Linder, Charlie Chaplin and Mack Sennett into something new and elegant. At the same time, the restoration of this sublime farce reveals it as a silent classic in its own right.

By 1928, Clair had moved on from his early art films – the *cinéma pur* of *Entr'acte* (1924) and the SF caper *Paris qui dort* (1925) – and joined Albatros, a French studio staffed mostly by Russian exiles. It was here that he made his best-known silent, the beautifully elaborate farce *The Italian Straw Hat* (*Un chapeau de paille d'Italie*, 1927). Clair's triumphs *Under the roofs of Paris* (*Sous les toits de Paris*, 1930) and *A nous la liberté* (1931) were ahead of him, but *Two Timid Souls* is his silent masterpiece, folding the avant garde and the comic into a delightful, expertly judged story of provincial romance and misapprehension.

Two Timid Souls takes what could be a Linder scenario, of a young middle-class man overcoming obstacles in pursuit of a pretty girl, merges it with Chaplinesque outsider charm and punctuates it with Keystone-quality chaos.

Clair, a former journalist, was first inspired to write film scenarios by watching Chaplin films, and this influence is evident – especially when his hero fidgits with the tassel on a cushion or is petrified by an encounter with an angry motorist. Chaplin appeared to return the compliment when he made *Modern Times* (1936), a film that seemed to owe such a debt to *A nous la liberté* that Clair's bosses sued United Artists.

Two Timid Souls is, like *The Italian Straw Hat*, an adaptation of a Eugène Labiche play. The hero, the first timid one, is a young lawyer called Fremissin (Pierre Batcheff,) charged with defending a wife-beater Thibaudier (Maurice de Féraudy). It's his first day in court, and nerves get the better of him – and so Thibaudier is put away for a short sentence. His client is understandably aggrieved at his below-par representation. In the first of many master-strokes, Clair throws away the play's dialogue, rendering the closing argument entirely in images. What should be a re-enactment of the crime scene becomes a cloying fantasy of marital bliss, with Thibaudier's uxorious virtues multiplied in a kaleidoscopic split-screen. Whenever Fremissin falters, the figures freeze.

Years pass, and Fremissin is courting a local girl who unknown to him seems doomed to

In 'Two Timid Souls' an imaginary battle is as likely to wound as a real one



The original poster for *Two Timid Souls*

marry Thibaudier. Her father (the second timid one) can't bring himself to refuse the brute, and the young lover is too shy to propose. Timidity loses its charm as danger looms and the whole mess will only be resolved with ludicrous amounts of violence, real and imagined.

Clair summarised Labiche's plays as "vaudeville-nightmare": comedy spiked with fear. The film's immaculate *mise en scène*, with its attractive lovers, bourgeois interiors and well-kept lawns, is a veil for brutality about to surface at any moment. Just as in the court scene, fantasy and reality mingle, so declaring the presence of bandits seems to conjure them out of thin air, and the noise taken for a gunshot will always be a burst tyre, until it is finally, shockingly, the sound of a bullet being fired.

Another split-screen sequence features Fremissin and Thibaudier rehearsing their moves in anticipation of a punch-up. Contrasting high and low angles suggest which man sees himself as David and which Goliath, and arrange the pair almost – but not quite – into a genuine grapple. Their blows fail to connect, but they react as if they were real – here an imaginary battle is just as likely to wound as a physical one. When the combatants are back in court the fantasy images and the split-screens return. As accusation and counter-accusation flash before the audience's eyes, it is revealed that victory in court, as in romance, is a confidence trick.

Two Timid Souls was until recently little seen, but that may change. The Cinémathèque Française and the San Francisco Silent Film Festival have produced a gorgeous 4K restoration, based on an original camera negative acquired by Henri Langlois in 1958. It's a fitting tribute to a film that deploys its own prettiness as a weapon, and presents a sitting-room brawl with panache worthy of a symphony. 📍

DISTANT VOICES

Traumatic recent events and contested histories haunt the new work by artist and filmmaker John Akomfrah

By Laura Allsop

In John Akomfrah's new two-channel video installation, *Auto Da Fé*, footage of the ocean's indifferent roiling is juxtaposed with images of floating life-jackets, a teddy bear bobbing belly-up on turquoise swells, and a beached Ghana-Must-Go bag. This flotsam carries a terrible and timely symbolism. *Auto Da Fé* (meaning 'acts of faith') is showing at London's Lisson Gallery alongside two further new video works, all of them reflections on time, memory and human migration by the acclaimed director and artist, who has long translated the political into his unique aesthetic language. In Bristol, his film *Vertigo Sea*, an ambitious three-screen work exploring the sea as life-giver and graveyard, is being screened until April as part of a major exhibition of his work at the Arnolfini Centre for Contemporary Arts.

Akomfrah began his career more than 30 years ago as a founding member of the influential Black Audio Film Collective (BAFC). The group is perhaps best known for its 1986 film *Handsworth Songs*, a lyrical essay about the 1985 riots in London and Birmingham that resolutely eschews didacticism. Now as then, and through works made for the cinema, television and the gallery, Akomfrah is preoccupied with the politics of identity and becoming, the absences in historical narrative, and the ghosts of the past.

While the archive has played a significant role in Akomfrah's work – notably in *The Unfinished Conversation*, his superb 2012 three-screen installation tribute to the influential cultural theorist Stuart Hall (who died in 2014) – the work displayed at Lisson was composed solely from his own imagery. Recently, he has revealed a penchant for shooting natural landscapes haunted by lone, silent figures dressed in the costumes and accoutrements of the past, while continuing to employ the meditative camerawork and *tableaux vivants* developed with BAFC. Akomfrah demonstrates an almost painterly eye, framing ruins, landscapes and the human face with an exquisite sense of colour and composition. C-prints taken from the three new films are accordingly displayed throughout the Lisson gallery space.

Single-channel video *Tropikos*, an "experimental costume drama", is situated on a waterway in south-west England with historic connections to the slave trade. We see African men coming inland on boats laden with spices, masks and fruit, their faces mournful and lost, while white men and women in opulent 16th-century dress are shown slumbering among their beautifully arranged plunder. A voiceover consists of words taken from texts such as *The Tempest* and *Paradise Lost*, but the newcomers are silent, their voices lost to history. Title cards allude to a variety of locations, from the Guinea Coast to Sierra Leone, while the landscape bears variously subtle and disjunctive signs of the contemporary. This layering of associations and



Still life: *Auto Da Fé*

historical registers builds a rich and complex visual tapestry, where multiple pasts crisscross, much like Akomfrah's itinerant protagonists.

Elsewhere in the show, the video installation *The Airport*, set in the ruin of a once-grand Athenian airport, features men and women bedecked in the clothes of different eras, their movements captured from different angles and played across three screens. Also roaming this non-place are an astronaut and a gorilla, both echoes from Stanley Kubrick's 2001: *A Space Odyssey* (1968), a film whose spectacular final scenes famously collapse linear time to dizzying effect. With its protracted takes and lyrical tone, the work is also a homage to the late Greek director Theo Angelopoulos. The vestiges of different, distant empires are glimpsed in a night-time view of the Parthenon, the grounded Olympic planes and looming silhouettes of vast ships in the harbour. Long-time collaborator Trevor Mathison, who scores all of these works under the direction of Akomfrah, layers up the sounds on this piece – snippets of a radio broadcast played over a




John Akomfrah

Akomfrah is preoccupied with the politics of identity and becoming, the absences in historical narrative, the ghosts of the past

recording of Greek song, for example – to further compound the sense of overlapping histories.

Auto Da Fé, meanwhile, imagines victims of religious persecution over the last 400 years, from Sephardic Jews fleeing Brazil in 1654 to the more recent flights from Mali and Mosul – shot, however, entirely in Barbados. It is the work that speaks most to the present refugee crisis, with its images of hands clinging to the sides of boats and the relics of arduous and fatal journeys washing up on the shore. And it is in the breaking surf that some of their stories are obliquely told, as the camera focuses on photographs of human faces surfacing briefly before being submerged once more. (Archive still photography is a recurring feature of Akomfrah's work, from the very first tape slides of BAFC to the sequences in *Handsworth Songs* where the camera glides about a series of suspended black-and-white photos.)

All of these works are haunted by figures who do not or cannot speak, who are engaged in a rootless wandering, and whose landscapes are punctuated by fragments of the past. Some of the most arresting moments occur when the faces of these nameless, voiceless people turn to look straight at the camera. Here, all too briefly, there is a sense of awakening, of the gaze reaching across time to touch the present. 

i John Akomfrah's new video works are exhibited at the Lisson Gallery, London until 12 March. *Vertigo Sea* is at the Arnolfini, Bristol until 10 April

HISTORY REPEATING

Stan Douglas's new work riffs on Hitchcock and Conrad to subvert the linear progression of cinema and history

By Erika Balsom

Fear not, contemporary art's obsession with cinema is alive and well. With *The Secret Agent* (2015), Stan Douglas reaffirms his position as the art world's foremost interrogator of the expanded possibilities of cinematic narrative. After coming to prominence as part of the infatuation with film history that marked the art of the 1990s, Douglas has spent more than a quarter of a century producing multi-screen installations that interrogate the relationship between the moving image and historical memory. Now, at a time when many of his contemporaries such as Omer Fast and Fiona Tan have moved into feature film production, the Canadian artist remains steadfastly within the gallery, staging an encounter between linear storytelling and multiple projections on looped display.

Across six screens positioned three apiece on parallel walls, Douglas unfolds a 52-minute adaption of Joseph Conrad's 1907 novel *The Secret Agent* at the Victoria Miro gallery. Transposing this story of terrorism, murder and betrayal to Lisbon in the immediate aftermath of the 1974 overthrow of the dictatorship, the installation follows Alex Verloc – anarchist, secret agent and cinema proprietor. Verloc is asked by the American embassy to execute a bombing of “modernity itself” – the Marconi installation, a communications link between Europe and America – with the aim of scaring the population and thereby influencing the outcome of the upcoming elections. This event remains unrepresented, functioning as a structuring absence around which the relationships between characters take shape. Verloc's stepson dies in the explosion; when his wife finds out she takes her revenge.

The name Verloc and the broad strokes of this story may sound familiar: Douglas's source material has been adapted before, in *Sabotage* (1936). Hitchcock transformed Verloc's place of business from a shop to a cinema, a change Douglas maintains and charges with meaning. Cinema in *The Secret Agent* is more than just a setting; by using a movie theatre as a key locale, Douglas invites one to approach his installation as in part about the cinema itself and its status as a technology of modernity and a form of mass spectacle. But this is not to say that he is unequivocally in love with the seventh art. On the contrary, cinema emerges in *The Secret Agent* as a contested institution, particularly due to its relation to the spectator and sequential organisation of time.

In one sequence, the action occurring in the cinema's lobby fills two screens, while a third shows what is happening simultaneously inside the adjacent screening room. A full house stares forward in rapt attention, oblivious to what is taking place outside. This is *The Secret Agent*'s sole image of the mass public, an entity it does not characterise kindly. One character dismisses




In the loop: *The Secret Agent* updates Joseph Conrad's novel to 1974 Lisbon

“the filthy, unconscious multitude”, while the US embassy official treats the Portuguese population as pawns in his geopolitical game. The crowd of spectators serves as a metonym for these beguiled masses, with their placid immobility standing in immediate contrast to the bodily comportment of visitors to the installation, who move around, following the action across the projections as they wish. Douglas frequently confines himself to two or three screens at a time, using directional sound to cue the viewer as to where to look. Though *The Secret Agent* is in many ways a conventional period drama, its visual approach is emphatically far from cinema's voyeuristic regime of the keyhole. Absorption never quite takes hold in the installation – and perhaps this is the point. In setting stationary dupes against ambulatory viewers, it replays a spurious trope that has circulated widely in art criticism, namely the notion that cinematic spectatorship is inherently passive when compared to the supposed physical and critical activity of the gallery-goer.

Thankfully, Douglas's move away from linear sequencing proves more fruitful. The installation redoubles the montage of succession occurring on individual screens with a skilful montage of simultaneity occurring across screens, spatialising filmic narrative. Alongside the replacement

of one shot by another, coexistence becomes a central compositional principle. This move away from formal sequential chronology occurs too in the installation's narrative structure. While *The Secret Agent* does possess a beginning, middle and end, it is exhibited on a loop that endlessly shuttles between the title cards “two weeks before” and “two weeks later”, circling around the empty centre of the elided explosion and unsettling any stable point of temporal reference.

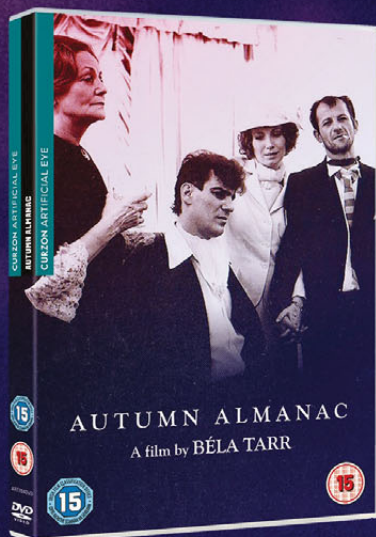
Douglas has long investigated the relationship between narrative and the loop. His *Subject to a Film: Marnie* (1989), another invocation of Hitchcock, is a 16mm re-enactment of the film's robbery scene that begins again when Marnie's hands are on the safe, thus imprisoning her in an endless cycle of crime but saving her from Mark Rutland. While this early work stands as a preliminary foray into thinking how the loop of gallery exhibition confronts the start-to-finish viewing of cinema, *The Secret Agent* takes up these concerns in a more complex way, as part of a reflection on the nature of history. If linear narrative situates past and present along a straight line of forward progression, the loop suggests a way of extricating history from teleology. Buttressed by Douglas's repetition of Conrad and Hitchcock, itself a form of recurrence, the cyclical form of *The Secret Agent* denies the arrow of time, proposing instead that history might be nothing other than an eternal return of shock-doctrine manipulation. In this regard, the artist fulfils the embassy official's demand: “Bomb modernity,” indeed. 

 **The Secret Agent** shows at the Victoria Miro Gallery, London, until 24 March

Cinema emerges as a contested institution, particularly in relation to the spectator and the sequential organisation of time

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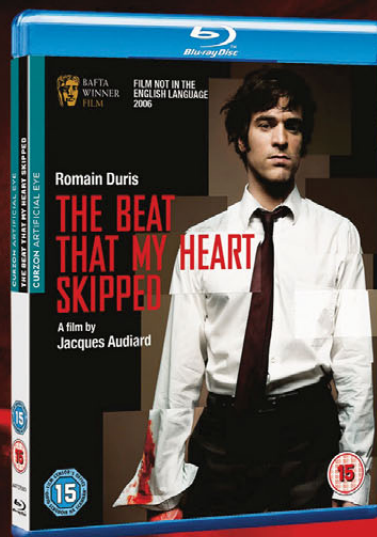


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Reviews



82 **Marguerite**

Aided by Catherine Frot's warm lead performance, the film offers a complex and poignant meditation on truth-telling, the function of art and the mechanics of intimate relationships



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Songs of innocence: Vira Sathidar (right) plays singer Narayan Kamble, arrested for abetting the suicide of a local worker

Court

India/The Netherlands 2014

Director: Chaitanya Tamhane

Reviewed by Naman Ramachandran

The history of commercial Indian cinema is littered with courtroom movies, with filmmakers using the setting either to stage thunderous declamatory dramas such as *Kanoon* (1960), *Meri Jung* (1985) and *Damini* (1993) or mine it for comedy as in *Kyo Kii... Main Jhuth Nahin Bolta* (2001) and *Jolly LLB* (2013). However, Chaitanya Tamhane's feature debut *Court* is a satire that's of a piece with *Mohan Joshi Hazir Ho!* (1984); a standard-bearer of the country's erstwhile parallel cinema movement, that film took a comic look at the hopeless inadequacies of the Indian justice system, where cases can drag on for decades. In terms of an accurate snapshot of court workings of its time, *Court* is comparable to the 12 *Angry Men* remake *Ek Ruka Hua Faisla* (1986). That said, *Court* is much more than a courtroom satire—it is a satire on Indian society in general, and in particular the country's various parochial class and language fissures.

Tamhane sets the tone early on with the sheer ludicrousness of the case being contested in a Mumbai sessions court. Narayan Kamble, a

65-year-old agitprop singer, is accused of abetting the suicide of a sewage worker by virtue of performing an inflammatory song in the vicinity of his residence. Tamhane wisely eschews a knowing approach here, opting instead for the role of a gentle observer of the proceedings. Hence the public prosecutor Nutan examines the case in all seriousness, liberally quoting Victorian legal arcana in the most prosaic manner possible, while her opponent, defence lawyer Vora, is at his wits' end trying to demonstrate that laws created in the 1850s may perhaps not be relevant in modern society. The judge is clearly interested in moving the case along and doesn't hesitate to jump in with his own interpretations of the matter at hand.

Tamhane's observational approach is aided by his visual aesthetic, which largely consists of static shots at a remove from the subject. It's an approach that echoes that of his 2011 short *Six Strands*, a fable about a despotic woman who rules a tea-farming community in the Himalayan foothills, in which the camera barely moves.

The film soars when Tamhane leaves the courtroom and, as gently as ever, juxtaposes Vora and Nutan's personal lives. Nutan is from the Maharashtrian lower middle class; she travels by commuter train and cooks and cleans for her family when she returns to their tenement after work. Vora on the other hand is a do-gooder born into privilege, from the affluent Gujarati

community, who are from an adjacent state but established in Mumbai for centuries. He drives around in a car while listening to jazz, buys wine and cheese in fancy supermarkets and frequents lounges where musicians interpret Brazilian songs. He is clearly not in the legal profession for the money. Indian class divisions are sharply defined during a magnificent sequence depicting lunch at Vora's parents' place. One of Kamble's acolytes, Subodh, from the same underprivileged class as the agitprop artist, arrives just as Vora's family are about to start eating. Even as Vora's mother fetches a plate for Subodh, he hesitates to join them. Vora asks him to sit down, saying, "Please, it's just awkward otherwise." Vora's father then casually asks Subodh if the watchman gave



Geetanjali Kulkarni plays the prosecutor



Much more than a courtroom satire, this is a satire on Indian society in general, and in particular parochial class and language fissures

like the alleged suicide victim, work in the city's sewers. Vora's questioning of the dead man's wife reveals that he would go to work drunk to help him bear the stench of the gutters, with no safety equipment, no mask, no boots and armed with only a spade to shovel the shit. In his observation of the community that carries out such work, Tamhane is informed by Anand Patwardhan's seminal documentary *Jai Bhim Comrade* (2011).

While taking critical aim at a variety of societal issues in this way, the film never loses sight of its central theme – the gagging of freedom of expression, which is thrown into sharp relief by the utter ridiculousness of the case against Kamble. It is ironic that the film itself was subject to some changes by the Indian censors. For the local release, the filmmakers had to add a disclaimer stating that this was a work of fiction, and that the characters, incidents and community and political party names are fictitious, and that there is no resemblance to anything real, thus immediately rendering it all

the more real. To be on the safe side, the Indian censor board also had this requirement before issuing certification: "To give an undertaking on stamp paper that there is no such case pending in the court of law, and in case of any complaint received, the applicant will be solely responsible for it as he is claiming the film to be fictional."

Despite the weighty themes it tackles, *Court* is ultimately a very funny film, but its farcical nature disguises a deep malaise. Tamhane realises that the best way to draw attention to problems is humour, and *Court* has the best kind, its situations creating uncomfortable laughter without recourse to sight gags or smart one-liners. The film has been rightly festooned with accolades and awards the world over, among them two prizes at the Venice Film Festival, and Tamhane and his team, including the remarkable Vivek Gomer (also the film's producer) as Vora, Geetanjali Kulkarni as Nutan and Vira Sathidar as Kamble, deserve a place at the high table of international cinema. It is also heartening to see a film like this getting a UK release, as distributors usually have little or no screen time for anything except commercial Indian cinema. *Court* is the latest in a wave of South Asian independent pictures to find international festival success over the past few years. If the quality can be sustained, distributors could be forced to treat films from the region with the same respect accorded to the best foreign-language cinema from the rest of the world. **S**

him any trouble at the gate, thus establishing the gulf in their societal status. Just as casually, Vora's father establishes that Subodh is a local Marathi-speaking Maharashtrian, a pointed contrast from the generally higher-status Gujarati background of the Vora family.

Many urban Indians are multilingual and Tamhane's choice of retaining the languages that people would naturally use, including Marathi, Hindi, Gujarati and English, is a welcome step away from the majority of Indian films where most characters speak in only one language. The culturally and politically loaded aspect of language is highlighted when Nutan goes to the theatre with her family; in the play, the Marathi-speaking heroine brings home her Hindi-speaking boyfriend, who's subjected to an interrogation by the girl's father and then unceremoniously thrown out of the house. The father turns to the audience and declaims that outsiders may have taken his people's land and their jobs, but they definitely will not be allowed to take their daughters – and he is rewarded with rapturous applause. In court, Nutan cross-examines Kamble in Marathi; Vora requests a switch to English, and is stumped when Kamble prefers to stay with his native tongue. Like many Mumbaikars, Vora does not know Marathi.

Tamhane also finds time to dwell on the appalling conditions endured by those who,



Trial and tribulation: Vinay Vora (Vivek Gomer) argues against outdated laws in defending Kamble

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Vivek Gomer
Written by
Chaitanya Tamhane
Director of Photography
Mrinal Desai
Edited by
Rikhav Desai
Production Design

Pooja Talreja
Somnath Pal
Original Music
Sambhaji Bhagat
Sound Design
Anita Kushwaha
Amrit Pritam
Costume Design
Sachin Lovalekar

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presents
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production
Produced with the
support of the Hubert

Bals Fund of the
International Film
Festival Rotterdam
Executive Producer
B.S. Narayanaswamy

Cast
Vira Sathidar
Narayan Kamble

Vivek Gomer
Vinay Vora
Geetanjali Kulkarni
Public Prosecutor
Nutan
Pradeep Joshi
Judge Sanjay
Sadavarte
Shirish Pawar
Subodh Kushte

Usha Bane
Sharmila Pawar
In Colour
[2.35:1]
Subtitles
Distributor
Day for Night

Mumbai, India, the present. Sixty-five-year-old agitprop singer Narayan Kamble is arrested mid-performance. The charge against him is abetment of suicide – one of his songs allegedly incited sewage worker Vasudev Pawar to seek his own death in one of the gutters he cleaned. Defence lawyer Vinay Vora is unable to obtain bail for his client. Using a statement from the investigating officer and another from an eyewitness, prosecuting lawyer Nutan builds a case against Kamble. Nutan's interpretation of the case sticks strictly to the letter of the law. Vora tries to argue that some of the legal points his opponent is quoting are archaic, dating back to the 19th century. However, Judge Sadavarte

sides with Nutan. Pawar's wife appears in court and testifies that her husband had made no mention of any song, or suicide, and that he habitually went to work in unsafe conditions, inebriated and without any safety equipment. Vora proves that the eyewitness is in cahoots with the police. Judge Sadavarte grants Kamble bail and the latter immediately returns to his agitprop activities. He is arrested again on charges of printing and possessing seditious literature. On the court's last working day before the summer recess, Vora requests bail on the grounds that his client is ill. Bail is denied and the court is adjourned. Sadavarte goes on holiday with his extended family.

High-Rise

United Kingdom/Belgium 2015

Director: Ben Wheatley

Certificate 15 118m 54s

Reviewed by Henry K. Miller

Spoiler alert: this review reveals a plot twist

In Ben Wheatley's *High-Rise*, as in his previous film *A Field in England* (2013), also written by Amy Jump, the country is on the edge of something. In the earlier film it was the execution of Charles I and the establishment of a Puritan republic; in this one it's Margaret Thatcher's first general election victory 330 years later. Jump has adapted J.G. Ballard's source novel, set in the Britain of the 1960s or 1970s but largely free of specific period markers, into a film redolent of the book's year of publication, 1975, also the year that Thatcher became Tory leader. Cars, costumes, decor and facial hair are all echt mid-1970s. Whereas the high-rise of the book – more or less a stand-in for the Barbican, populated by “an apparently homogeneous collection of high-income professional people” – is riven by violent, quasi-social conflicts that seem to have their origin in the building's design, in the film the revolt of the airline pilots of the lower floors against the tax consultants of the middle is tantamount to actual class war. The rolling power cuts and overflowing rubbish bins bring to mind the Three-Day Week and the Winter of Discontent, and one of the orgies characterising the building's descent into social chaos evokes Bianca Jagger's fabled entrance into Studio 54 on a white horse.

Richard Wilder (Luke Evans), a lower-storey television documentary maker alienated by the building's automation of daily life, becomes an emblem of virtually proletarian authenticity, while sharp-suited, clean-shaven physiologist Robert Laing (Tom Hiddleston) is a prototypical yuppie of the next decade, newly installed in a mid-level apartment and perfectly attuned to the regime of anomie and anonymity. In so far as the film has a plot beyond the unravelling of the high-rise's social fabric, it is centred on Wilder and Laing's relationship with the building's architect and owner Anthony Royal (Jeremy Irons). A frustrated modernist who has had to build an English country garden on the roof to please his upper-class wife Ann (Keeley Hawes), he laments that the high-rise, conceived along egalitarian brutalist lines as a “crucible for change”, has become home to “the vanguard of the well-to-do”.

For the somewhat inarticulate Wilder, denied access to the upper floors, the whole edifice must be torn down; for Laing, whose social status is more ambiguous, Royal's original conception was misguided, since it allowed the traditional class divisions to reassert themselves, but not irredeemable. In Laing's view, and eventually in Royal's, the high-rise's inhabitants' seeming descent into barbarism is actually a first step towards freedom, fulfilling their unconscious expectations. At the end, Royal wonders whether he may unwittingly have brought into being a “paradigm for future developments”; and his murder by Wilder confirms his hypothesis by enabling Laing to occupy his new self to the full.

Laing's name is almost certainly meant to echo that of the radical (or anti-) psychiatrist R.D. Laing, who wrote in 1967's *The Politics of Experience* that “humanity is estranged from its authentic possibilities”, that “our collusive madness is what we call sanity” and that the “fundamental human



Divided self: Robert Laing (Tom Hiddleston) in the elevator of his high-rise residence

significance of architecture” lay in the kinds of experience it offered or curtailed – although unlike Robert, R.D. thought that conditions in the “modern megalopolis” were necessarily constricting. In an early scene, Robert is shown happily dissecting a human brain for the benefit of his students, having peeled back the face from the skull. It's a striking image, which takes on additional significance when it reappears in a Roegian montage as the high-rise enters another stage of “collusive madness” – and it may well have been inspired by the real Laing, who wrote in *The*

Politics of Experience of the old belief that “the ‘seat’ of the soul was somewhere in the brain. Since brains began to be opened up frequently, no one has seen ‘the soul!’” Hiddleston's character, deftly suggesting without parading the damage that has been done beneath the dapper exterior, does not give the impression that he still believes there is anything to see. In a related piece of effective symbolism – he describes the building as an “unconscious design of some sort of psychiatric event” – he eventually gives up trying to paint the exposed concrete ducts in his apartment



Observation tower: at key moments, the action is shown through the eyes of a child, Toby (Louis Suc)



reading is that, from Toby's youthful standpoint, Thatcher holds out the promise of change.

However, Toby's point of view doesn't dominate the film, which is too often larky in tone rather than menacing or mysterious. Perhaps it is inevitable that, in the age of sexting, some of what Ballard imagined now seems like old-world courtesy, but much of *High-Rise* resembles a grubby, all-too-human swingers' party more than the birth of a new civilisation fit for "an advanced species of machine" as Ballard puts it in the novel. Moreover, the tonal uncertainty leads to a disastrous lapse of judgement, when Charlotte's rape by Wilder is given a soundtrack of Portishead slowly and mournfully travestying Abba's 'SOS'.

All in all, the most interesting departures from Ballard are made too fitfully, and the least welcome too boldly. The thick period fidelity is sometimes a distraction; if we are meant to believe that Hiddleston's character is following a "logic more powerful than reason", as he says in voiceover at the end, then the 1970s set-dressing and entry-level political gloss are unnecessary. Summing up his difference from his contemporaries in an interview with Will Self, Ballard once said: "What I am not interested in is what happened 20 years ago." Whereas Ballard's vision of a world irrevocably transformed by technology and pharmacology remains bracing in its deliberate excision of feeling and its disregard for conventional pieties, Wheatley's reconstruction of the lost England of 40 years ago cossets rather than disturbs its assumed audience, never more so than when dragging on Thatcher at the end as a kind of *diabolus ex machina* that everyone can be expected to boo. 📺

Tom Hiddleston's Dr Robert Laing is a prototypical yuppie, perfectly attuned to the regime of anomie and anonymity

and allows the building's logic to take over.

At some significant points the action is shown through the eyes of a child, Toby (Louis Suc), illegitimate son of Royal and Charlotte Melville (Sienna Miller), the latter of whom becomes Laing's occasional lover. Children are a source of special resentment for the upper-storey residents, in both book and film, and the adoption of Toby's point of view – also perhaps the view of child-of-the-1970s Wheatley – is a telling departure that could be interpreted as a check on Ballard's ironic but still discernibly libertarian perspective on the decadence he depicts. A slight note of accusation, unsounded in Ballard, may be heard when Toby discovers his mother and Laing *in flagrante delicto* – in the novel they wait till he's asleep.

In this way perhaps, and certainly in others, the partial adoption of Toby's viewpoint is central to Jump and Wheatley's decision to ground *High-Rise* in history. During the film's first party, Toby is seen in his bedroom putting together a radio kit; in the final shot he is listening to a recording of Thatcher arguing in a Commons debate of November 1976 that "there is only one economic system in the world, and that is capitalism", the important difference being between state capitalism and private capitalism. This seems to be intended to provide a clinching explanation for the high-rise's transformation, and to make explicit the privatised nature of the new 'paradigm'. But a dissident

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Jeremy Thomas
Written by
Amy Jump
Based on the novel
by J.G. Ballard
Director of Photography
Laurie Rose
Edited by
Amy Jump
Ben Wheatley
Production Designer
Mark Tildesley
Music Composed by
Clint Mansell
Sound Designer
Martin Pavey
Costume Designer

Odile Dicks-Mireaux
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Production Companies
Jeremy Thomas, HanWay Films, Film4 and BFI present in association with Northern Ireland Screen, Ingenious Media, Scope Pictures and S Films
a Recorded Picture Company production

A film by Ben Wheatley
Made with the partial assistance of the European Regional Development Fund through Northern Ireland Screen
Produced by Backwell Productions Limited
Developed with the support of Film4
With support from the Tax Shelter of the Belgian Federal Government via Scope Invest
Made with the support of the BFI's Film Fund

Executive Producers
Peter Watson
Thorsten Schumacher
Lizzie Francke
Sam Lavender
Anna Higgs
Gabriella Martinelli
Christopher Simon
Geneviève Lemal

Richard Wilder
Elisabeth Moss
Helen Wilder
James Purefoy
Pangbourne
Keeley Hawes
Ann
Peter Ferdinando
Cosgrove
Sienna Guillory
Jane
Reece Shearsmith
Steele
Enzo Cilenti
Talbot
Augustus Prew
Munrow
Dan Skinner
Simmons

Stacy Martin
Fay
Tony Way
Robert the caretaker
Leila Mimmack
Laura
Bill Paterson
Mercer
Louis Suc
Toby

In Colour
[2.35:1]
Distributor
Studiocanal Limited

Cast
Tom Hiddleston
Dr Robert Laing
Jeremy Irons
Anthony Royal
Sienna Miller
Charlotte Melville
Luke Evans

London, 1975. Physiology lecturer Robert Laing moves into an apartment halfway up an exclusive new high-rise development that seems to be isolated from the rest of the world. Soon he becomes sexually involved with near-neighbour Charlotte Melville, and is taken up socially by the building's penthouse-dwelling architect Anthony Royal, father of Charlotte's son Toby; however, he is shunned by the other residents of the upper floors. The building's physical and social infrastructure starts to break down and life degenerates into a permanent orgy. Animosity between the different levels of the building lead to violence. In particular, denizens of the upper levels resent the children of the lower-level residents, and the building goes into terminal decline after a children's party in a swimming pool gets out of hand.

Young father Richard Wilder, a television documentary maker, blaming Royal for the high-rise's malign atmosphere and worsening condition, ascends the building and rapes Charlotte, before being caught by Royal's henchmen. Laing analyses him but refuses to lobotomise him, on the grounds that his rebellion against the building is rational. Over dinner with Laing, Royal, initially disappointed that his egalitarian designs for the high-rise have been betrayed by its residents, arrives at the view that he may well have liberated them after all. Later, Wilder goes up to the top floor and kills Royal, and is in turn killed by Royal's wife Ann and her friends. Laing, content, looks forward to the neighbouring high-rises submitting to the same irrational impulses that have consumed his.



To the devil a daughter: Anya Taylor-Joy plays Thomasin, a young woman accused of witchcraft in New England in 1630

The Witch

Director: Robert Eggers
Certificate 15 92m 43s

Reviewed by Roger Clarke

In 1630, a mere few decades after the king of Scotland and England has written his own book on the subject of witches and has personally attended their courtroom examination, these same witches arrive in America not on their broomsticks but on the silver tongues of Puritan divines.

Cast out of a colony when he refuses to recognise the godly authority of the town elders, William (Ralph Ineson) gathers up his large family and decides to seek out the very frontier of known civilisation, the untamed wilderness where he will delve like Adam and find a personal accommodation with his Creator. The usual expectation of such a narrative in cinema would be a confrontation and culture-clash with Native Americans, with burial grounds and other horror tropes animated by (since this is New England) Narragansett magic. In fact, the only Native Americans we see in *The Witch* are paradoxically glimpsed inside the colony as the gates close behind William and his departing family. No girls are stolen by warrior braves, but pagan superstitions and

alien rites weigh heavily on everyone's minds. Here, witches fly in on the wings of scripture and latterly on the breath of a large male goat.

When we first see the woods rise up like a cliff before the family's new homestead, marking the furthest point of the parish of Christ, a perfect sonic wail goes up on the soundtrack, akin to the Ligeti invocation of Kubrick's 2001 monolith (debut director Robert Eggers has mentioned *The Shining* as an influence). This aboriginal heartland represents something pre-Adamite. The first intimation that things are not right here is quite daintily made – William's 15-year-old daughter Thomasin is playing peek-a-boo with her baby brother Samuel on a sunny day in the open air, and in one of those seconds when she places her hands over her eyes, the child vanishes. The name of the baby seems significant – Samuel was the ghost raised by the only witch in the Bible, the Witch of Endor. Thomasin is blamed by her mother for the child's disappearance, unfairly, and thereby begins a train of events in which this young woman is alienated from her parents and siblings.

We watch as the family unit, racked with hunger as the first harvest fails, begins to disintegrate and die off. As is appropriate for the mainstream superstitious beliefs of the time, where so often priapic animals represented what was called 'maleficia', the goat 'Black Phillip' seems to stand in for the devil himself. Hares

appear, which may be shape-shifting witches. A raven seems to represent something *unheimlich* too. Naked crones are seen in nocturnal covens in the thickets of the pagan wood; a witch's house is depicted more like something out of the Brothers Grimm than, say, a shamanic intrusion from a Native American belief system. In the first hint that Eggers means for there to be an objective reality to the witches' presence, the scene cuts to them using the baby's blood and fat to anoint their broomsticks (in folkloric terms, an authentic detail known to James I).

Academics, folklorists and historians will marvel at the linguistic and cultural veracity of the film. *The Witch*, which is subtitled 'A New-England Folktale', is astoundingly well researched and sourced. The script is so freighted with genuine 17th-century language and ideas that it should be essential viewing for historians and academic folklorists as much as for a general witch-hungry genre crowd. Eggers's script is taken from Caroline sources, farming manuals, devotional books, diaries and accounts of witch trials. The accents are regional English; after all, the original settlers of the first colony of Roanoke had Lincolnshire accents and lived in Lincolnshire vernacular cottages.

To what extent does the film present the supernatural events as real? The most problematic scene in this regard is when the mother Katherine, played by Kate Dickie, falls



Pagan superstition and alien rites weigh heavily on the settlers' minds. Here witches fly on the wings of scripture and latterly on the breath of a large male goat

into a trance where everything is restored, and the baby Samuel is returned to her and is at suck on her breast. Then we flip into 'reality' and see – one of the truest moments of horror in the movie – a crow pecking at her bloodied teat. Yes, she's hallucinating, but it seems that the bird (like many of the animals in this film) is real, and yet perhaps also a version of a supernatural entity. When Thomasin's teenage brother Caleb has a sexual encounter with a witch later in the movie, it leaves him destroyed and likely to die, and in a deathbed scene that is again presented as real, he coughs up an 'impossible' apple – significantly, the subject of an earlier lie. When Caleb, under some kind of spell, is seduced by a beautiful witch, the vision is undermined by the sight of one of her arms appearing wizened.

Apparently Satanists love this unique film, and so, one expects, will Christian fundamentalists. Yet rationalists need not despair. There is something for them too in the Russian doll of stacked illusions. Are there environmental hallucinogens at play here? William's final ruined maize harvest could point to a well-established phenomenon known as ergotism: the quite clearly mouldy sheaves we see set up in stooks have all the hallmarks of the ergot poisoning of this era, where fungi on crops gave whole villages in Central Europe mass LSD-like experiences.

The ensemble acting is good, especially from the younger performers. Relative newcomer Anya Taylor-Joy is perfectly lip-biting and put-upon as the main candidate for the witch of the title (though you could equally make a case for her younger twin siblings Mercy and Jonas being the real witches all along, if you wanted to be especially perverse). Ineson gives an intense version with his good-hearted but deluded patriarch; Dickie is given a somewhat thankless task as the shrewish and endlessly grieving mother; the secret sale of her silver cup by her husband to buy food robs her not only of a Christian communion chalice but also takes from her an archetypal symbol of female power. The final showdown between mother and daughter has some slightly unfortunate overtones of a *Carrie* dirty-pillow tussle, but that's the only false note in the entire movie. In tone it's generally more Carl Dreyer than Stephen King.

It looks beautiful, the palette all bleached winter grasses, charcoal and dun. The low budget works to the film's benefit: the fact that much of the action takes place in a crude wooden cabin, in the animal byres or in the surrounding woods brings a sense of intimacy.

The soundtrack, meanwhile, is happy to ratchet up a growing sense of horror and drama.

Though shooting took place in northern Ontario, New England-raised Eggers has produced a film that so hauntingly evokes the early years of the region's parishes that it's almost unique in the roster of both historical drama and genre horror pictures. US culture tells itself all manner of distortions about those early Puritan fathers – that they were refugees, for example, when it would be more accurate to say that they were fighting for the right to persecute, and indeed felt there was not enough persecution happening in Britain. It's worth remembering that the later Salem witch trials would have continued had London not intervened.

All manner of feminist and other interpretations can be made about it, but in the end *The Witch* is significantly a film about starvation, and it has more in common with *Into the Wild* (2007) than with *The Crucible*. Yet this is clearly not just a starvation film. It's a film about evil. Those settlers didn't come over and find the devil among the pagans, the film seems to say. They brought the very devil with them. ☹

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by Jay Van Hoy Lars Knudsen Jodi Redmond Daniel Bekerman Rodrigo Teixeira Written by Robert Eggers Cinematography Jarin Blaschke Editor Louise Ford Production Design Craig Lathrop Original Music Mark Korven Production Sound Mixer Rob Turi Costume Design Linda Muir	Maiden Voyage Pictures, Mott Street Pictures presents in association with Code Red Productions, Scythia Films, Pulse Films, Special Projects Executive Producers Lourenço Sant'Anna Sophie Mas Michael Sackler Julia Godzinskaya Chris Columbus Eleanor Columbus Alex Sagalchik Alexandra Johns Jonathan Bronfman Thomas Benski Lucas Ochoa	William Kate Dickie Katherine Harvey Scrimshaw Caleb Ellie Grainger Mercy Lucas Dawson Jonas Bathsheba Garnett the witch In Colour [L66:1] Distributor Universal Pictures International UK & Eire
Production Companies Parts & Labor, RT Features, Rooks Nest Entertainment,	Cast Anya Taylor-Joy Thomasin Ralph Ineson	

New England, 1630. William is in conflict with the highly religious Puritan community where he lives with his family. After a hearing in some kind of civic convocation, he takes umbrage and decides to leave. Taking his careworn wife Katherine, older daughter Thomasin, son Caleb, twins Mercy and Jonas and baby Samuel, he strikes out for the wilderness, where they set up a farmstead. The situation begins to deteriorate. Samuel mysteriously vanishes while Thomasin is taking care of him, and she is blamed. In the woods beyond the farmstead, some witches seem to kill the child and smear his blood on their bodies. A first harvest fails. William secretly sells his wife's silver cup, and Thomasin is once again blamed for the disappearance. When William ventures into the woods to set traps for wild game, it seems to unleash a malign force. While playing, the twins accuse Thomasin of witchcraft. Caleb is apparently abducted by the witches in the woods, and later returns naked to the farmstead, where he dies in great distress. William locks Thomasin and the twins in the shed with the goats, including the ram 'Black Phillip'. Black Phillip apparently kills the twins and then kills William. Katherine attempts to strangle Thomasin but the latter dispatches her with a knife. Black Phillip, confronted by Thomasin, appears to speak, offering her a witches' covenant. Thomasin seems to wander into the woods, where she meets a celebrating coven of witches; she floats naked and ecstatic into the sky with them.



Into the wild: the frontier homestead of settlers William and Katherine

Anomalisa

USA 2015

Directors: Charlie Kaufman, Duke Johnson

Certificate 15 89m 57s

Reviewed by Graham Fuller

Aside from making the 2014 sitcom pilot *How and Why*, Charlie Kaufman has been missing in action since his directorial debut *Synechdoche, New York* seven years ago. The hiatus has scarcely diluted his authorial view that modern life is intolerable, a series of humiliating, futile quests to achieve material, artistic, romantic or spiritual goals likely to be impeded by the seeker's maladaptive behaviour. Though fellow fatalists Woody Allen (when in Dostoevskian mode) and Todd Solondz occupy similar territory, the arrival of Kaufman's stop-motion drama *Anomalisa* (co-directed by animation specialist Duke Johnson) reiterates the uniqueness of his surreally skewed metaphysical inquiries.

Kaufman originated *Anomalisa* as a 'sound play'. It was read by David Thewlis, Jennifer Jason Leigh and Tom Noonan as part of a double bill called *Theater of the New Ear* at UCLA in 2005. In the movie, everybody – with one exception – who enters the orbit of the existentially strung-out antihero Michael Stone (Thewlis) speaks with the same flat voice (Noonan's) and has the same benign face plastered on the same rounded head. An unmotivated motivational speaker and sales guru, Michael has become so infected by the insincere empathy he touts professionally that he can no longer differentiate one person from another.

The soullessness of his career as an avatar of consumerism has engulfed him with ennui and paranoia. *Synechdoche's* theatre director Caden Cotard (Philip Seymour Hoffman) – named for the Cotard delusion, whose sufferers believe they are dead – experiences a similar malaise, but grapples with it for decades by mounting a self-reflexive opus. Michael numbs himself through jouissance, preying on vulnerable women such as Lisa (Leigh), a fellow guest at Cincinnati's fictional Fregoli hotel. Kaufman named it after Fregoli delusion, a neuropsychiatric condition that causes sufferers to misidentify different people as a single person apparently disguised or able to change his or her appearance.

Equating digital-age conformism with non-individuation, Kaufman and Johnson made everyone except Lisa a virtual cyborg: Michael hallucinates that his jaw falls off, revealing a metallic rictus grimace worthy of Lon Chaney; lines on the puppets' temples and noses indicate where their modular parts join. Whereas live-action mimesis might have muted the characters' distinguishing traits – Michael's slumped gait, the half-curtain of mousy hair hiding Lisa's facial disfigurement – the puppets' movements invite anthropological scrutiny. The distancing effect of the animation limits subjective identification with the characters while heightening audience awareness of the film's social and sexual dynamics.

Typically, Kaufman examines the way people hide behind masks and the psychological significance of why Michael should perceive multiple versions of the same person. Playing with notions of projection and control, Kaufman has multiplied individuals before. *Being John Malkovich* (1999) mass-produced the eponymous actor, who was puppetised by the lowly puppeteer (John Cusack) in his head.



The great mundane: *Anomalisa*

In *Adaptation*. (2002), Nicolas Cage's insecure screenwriter is threatened by his freeloading twin-cum-alter ego. When *Synechdoche's* Caden starts creating doppelgängers for his epic meta-drama, he contrives to triple his amanuensis (Samantha Morton), having sabotaged their love affair when they were younger.

On returning home, Michael idly presents his young son Henry with a gift: an ornate antique sex toy in the guise of a mechanical singing geisha, which unexpectedly leaks semen. The incident has baffled some *Anomalisa* viewers, but there's no mistaking the semen's provenance. Michael has either masturbated into the automaton's mouth, or his seed has been magically transposed there, at no great risk to the film's logic, given that the toy is a substitute for the pliant Lisa.

The mystery concerns Michael giving Henry the automaton in a defiled state. Is he so befogged by self-absorption that he's oblivious to his actions, as he is oblivious to others? His

reluctance to talk to Henry when he calls home suggests he detests him for tying him to a tedious bourgeois family life and unconsciously wants to feminise (ie emasculate) him by contaminating him with his semen. That Henry was fixated on receiving a gift – and is thus a pushy little consumer – adds grist to this sinister mill.

Like Thewlis's demonic drifter in *Naked* (1993), Michael is a disaffected, unstable exploiter of women; both mirror social flux as they explore labyrinths (the Fregoli; inner-city London) symbolising the murky pathways of their minds. There's a troubling antecedent for Lisa, too: Leigh's phone-sex operator Lois in Robert Altman's *Short Cuts* (1993). They're linked by their caressing voices and their commercialising of them. Lois's clients respond to her pornographic spiel; Lisa's affect is soothing, like the YouTube cult ASMR. Leigh, in fact, steals the show with her a cappella 'Girls Just Want to Have Fun', especially poignant because Lisa – constitutionally cheery though she is – clearly hasn't had that much. ☹

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Rosa Tran
Duke Johnson
Charlie Kaufman
Dino Stamatopoulos
Written by
Charlie Kaufman
Original stage play
produced by St.
Ann's Warehouse at
Royce Hall, UCLA
Director of

Photography
Joe Passarelli
Edited by
Garret Elkins
Production Design
John Joyce
Huy Vu
**Music Composed
and Orchestrated by**
Carter Burwell
**Supervising
Sound Editors**

Aaron Glascock
Christopher Aud
Costume Designer
Susan Donym
**Animation
Supervisor**
Dan Driscoll

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**Production
Company**
A Snoot

Entertainment
production
Executive Producers
James A. Fino
Dan Harmon
Joe Russo II
Keith Calder
Jessica Calder
Aaron Mitchell
Kassandra Mitchell
Pandora Edmiston
David Fuchs

Simon Oré
David Rheingold
Adrian Versteegh

Voice Cast
Jennifer Jason Leigh
Lisa Hesselman
Tom Noonan
everyone else
David Thewlis
Michael Stone

In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
Curzon Film World

US, 2005. Michael Stone, an Englishman based in Los Angeles, flies into Cincinnati. The successful author of an inspirational book for customer-service representatives, he is to speak at a convention the next day. After checking into the Fregoli hotel, he phones Bella, a girlfriend he deserted 11 years before. They meet in the hotel bar. Bella, still heartbroken, leaves angrily after he invites her to his room. Seeking a gift for his five-year-old son Henry, Michael buys an antique singing geisha automaton in a sex shop he mistakes for a toyshop. During a paranoid episode at the hotel, he desperately seeks the owner of a dulcet voice and traces it to Lisa. She and her friend Emily

are baked-goods phone-sales reps from Akron who have come to Cincinnati to hear Michael's speech. After the three have drinks, Michael takes Lisa to his room. She says she discovered the word 'anomaly' in his book; he nicknames her 'Anomalisa'. They have sex. Michael has a nightmare. Over breakfast, Michael tells Lisa that he wants to live with her, but criticises her table manners. He breaks down during his public speech. His wife Donna welcomes him home with a party. Henry quickly loses interest in the automaton. Lisa writes affectionately to Michael, telling him that 'Anomalisa' (sic) is Japanese for 'Goddess of Heaven' (she means 'Amaterasu').

Black Mountain Poets

United Kingdom 2015
Director: Jamie Adams
Certificate 15 85m 29s

Reviewed by Matthew Taylor

In *Black Mountain Poets*, an amiable, gently skewed, improvised comedy, writer-director Jamie Adams finds a succinct way to lampoon the pseudery frequently associated with the poetry of the modern era: he makes his two central characters literal frauds. They are the fugitive Walker sisters – volatile, truculent Lisa (Alice Lowe) and diffident, cautious Claire (Dolly Wells) – whom we first glimpse shamolically attempting to steal a JCB under cover of darkness. More successful is the theft of a car belonging to the Wilding sisters, famed ‘novelty poets’ scheduled to appear as star guests at a rural creative retreat (the fantastically prosaic Poets’ Poetry Society). With a hefty cash prize awaiting the weekend’s best original composition, the Walkers pose as the Wildings among the unsuspecting attendees, who treat the sisters with a mixture of rock-star reverence and almost total bemusement.

Black Mountain Poets – its title wryly twinning the film’s makeshift Welsh gathering with the formidable projectivist poets of North Carolina – is the concluding feature in Adams’s ‘Modern Romance Trilogy’, following the similarly whimsical *Benny & Jolene* and *A Wonderful Christmas Time* (both 2014). It shares with its predecessors an interest in performance and its various guises – there’s a hint of Christopher Guest’s ensemble comedies in the lightly absurdist focus on an artistic circle that’s by turns painfully earnest and self-deluded. Improvisation here makes for a neatly reflexive fit, with characters often called upon to deliver spontaneous recitals – one such highlight being Lowe’s scowling interpretation, to a hushed audience, of an itemised supermarket receipt.

Lowe and Wells are an engaging, often very funny duo; it’s telling that the film struggles for momentum when they’re later divided by the romantic presence of handsome fellow guest Richard (*Downton Abbey*’s Tom Cullen). The sisters can be comically unaware of each other’s deeper motives. On the morning after a one-night stand with Richard, Lisa is introduced to Louise, his oblivious girlfriend, a meeting which makes her gag on her breakfast. “I’m so embarrassed,” she moans. “Why, because he saw you choking?” asks Claire, puzzled. A supposedly inspirational camping trip in the hills is a further test to this oddball sibling bond, as jealousy emerges and



Live poets’ society: Tom Cullen, Alice Lowe

loyalties shift. The comedy doesn’t always hit the mark, but even at its most arch the film has a genuine warmth and feeling for its floundering characters. There are occasional intrusions of disarming poignancy, such as Claire’s monologue directed to her late father, in which she ruefully wonders if the sisters have been a disappointment.

Shot over just five days, *Black Mountain Poets* is a hardy example of resourceful micro-budget filmmaking, aided in no small part by the game performances of its compact ensemble. In its charged feeling for landscape, Ryan Owen Eddleston’s expressive widescreen photography of the rugged Brecon terrain recalls Laurie Rose’s work in Ben Wheatley’s *Sightseers* (2012). Having co-written and starred in *Sightseers*, Lowe here offers a character not a million miles away from that film’s Tina – an unworldly yet ruthless figure prone to childish sulks. As the other half of their “genetic cul-de-sac”, Wells is a standout as the introverted, halting foil to Lowe’s bull in a china shop. Meanwhile Cullen, five years on from his impressive breakout role in Andrew Haigh’s *Weekend*, is genial company as Richard, a grounding element amid a slew of high-maintenance personalities.

Adams conducts proceedings in a loose, meandering fashion, yet the eccentric, benevolent comic sensibility evinced over his films thus far is present and correct. Over the course of *Black Mountain Poets*, this can prove a little erratic. But when so much of British feature comedy remains dully formulaic, its distinctive flavour is welcome. **S**

The Boy

USA/People’s Republic of China 2015
Director: William Brent Bell
Certificate 15 97m 12s

Reviewed by Violet Lucca

Spoiler alert: this review reveals a plot twist

Because we live in an age of over-literal movie titles (*Sisters*, *Concussion*, *Steve Jobs*, *Dirty Grandpa*), you know exactly what classic horror trope lies in store for you in *The Boy*, even though its plot incorporates several. Greta Evans (*The Walking Dead*’s Lauren Cohan) is putting distance between herself and a nasty domestic-abuse situation in the US by taking on a job as a nanny at an English country house. Arriving, she discovers that Brahms Heelshire, the naughty eight-year-old she’s supposed to be looking after, is actually a porcelain doll that her employers treat like a real boy. After the ‘boy’s’ parents leave for a holiday, unexplained noises, disappearing clothes and ominous POV shots begin to plague Greta with increasing frequency – but thankfully, she’s got super-cute grocery-delivery man Malcolm (Rupert Evans) to lean on. Good ol’ Mal fills her in on the details: the real Brahms died in a fire 20 years ago, and the doll showed up shortly afterwards. He goes on to explain that Brahms was an odd duck who quite possibly smashed in the head of one of his playmates. (Why on earth the Heelshires chose ‘Brahms’ over the more patriotic ‘Elgar’ sadly remains a mystery.)

While the first half of the film employs cheap jump scares (most of which turn out to be nightmares) and some incredibly ill-advised close-ups of taxidermy, later scenes venture into far darker psychological territory, as Greta finds concrete evidence that Brahms can move (only when she’s out of the room) and that she miscarried after being beaten by her ex-boyfriend. At this point Greta snaps into mindless guardian mode, methodically carrying out the detailed instructions the Heelshires have left for her; their pain has now been folded into her own.

Though dead children (and by extension, miscarriages) are among the most overused psychological motivators in any genre of film, there’s something deeply unsettling about Greta’s attempts to understand exactly what it is she’s dealing with. In between scenes of her begging God to give her a sign and Brahms interrupting her first hook-up with Malcolm, we’re also treated to the ugliness of country life, as Greta empties out the neglected rat-traps and food composting, complicating any visions of



Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Jon Rennie
Jamie Adams
Written by
Jamie Adams
Director of Photography
Ryan Owen Eddleston
Editor
Mike Hopkins
Art Director
Rachel Jammali
Composer
Ashley Adams
Sound Recordist
Caroline Singh
Costume Supervisor
Kay Anderson

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Limited Executive Producer
Jon Rennie

Cast

Alice Lowe
Lisa Walker
Dolly Wells
Claire Walker
Tom Cullen
Richard
Rosa Robson
Louise Cabaye
Richard Ellis
Gareth
Laura Patch
Stacey
Hannah Daniel
Alys Wilding

Claire Cage
Terri Wilding

In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
Metrodome
Distribution Ltd

Wales, present day. The Wilding sisters are en route to a rural poetry retreat, where they will be the star guests, when their car is stolen by fugitive siblings Lisa and Claire Walker. The Walkers pose as the Wildings at the retreat, where a substantial cash prize will be awarded to the best poem created during the weekend. Lisa and Claire both fall for the handsome Richard, who struggles to maintain a relationship with egocentric fellow poet Louise. On a camping trip, Richard angers Louise by sharing his tent with Lisa and Claire. When Richard and Claire become close, Louise tries and fails to stir Richard’s jealousy by feigning interest in Gareth, a hapless admirer. Claire’s romance with Richard leads Lisa to leave the camp. She reappears in time to deliver the weekend’s outstanding poem and reconcile with Claire. The real Wilding sisters finally arrive and are impressed by their imposters.



Toy meets girl: Lauren Cohan

refined decorative clutter and a warm Aga. Unfortunately, *The Boy* makes a U-turn back into cliché when it's revealed that the real Brahms – wearing a doll mask because he's got horrible facial scars from the fire, or something – has been living inside the walls the entire time, and that his parents lured Greta to their house as their final present to him. It's hard not to be reminded of Gerard Johnstone's 2014 lampoon of this conceit in *Housebound*, which makes it very hard not to laugh.

The final stretch becomes an unimaginative slash-and-chase scenario, with Greta assuming the standard-issue final-girl role. (Don't fear such mentions of finality: room is made for a sequel.) Still, this is where William Brent Bell's direction is the strongest, giving just the right amount of disorientation (and artistry) to Greta and Malcolm's mad dash through the insides of Brahms's lair. Given that the confluence of well-worn horror stock will either result in a smile of recognition or a sneer of overfamiliarity, perhaps it's best to think of *The Boy* as variations on a theme by Rod Serling. 📺

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by Tom Rosenberg Gary Lucchesi Richard Wright	Companies STX Entertainment, Lakeshore Entertainment and Huayi Brothers Pictures present a Lakeshore Entertainment Production in association with Vertigo Entertainment	Malcolm Jim Norton Mr Heelshire Diana Hardcastle Mrs Heelshire Ben Robson Cole James Russell Brahms Heelshire
Producers Jim Wedaa Roy Lee Matt Berenson	Executive Producers Eric Reid David Kern John Powers Middletton Robert Simonds Adam Fogelson Oren Aviv Wang Zhongjun Wang Zhonglei Donald Tang	Dolby Atmos/ Dolby Digital In Colour [2.35:1]
Written by Stacey Menear	Editor Brian Berdan	Distributor Entertainment Film Distributors Ltd
Director of Photography Daniel Pearl	Production Designer John Willett	
Music Bear McCreary	Sound Mixer Kevin Sands	
Costume Designer Jori Woodman		

©Lakeshore
Entertainment
Group LLC and STX
Productions, LLC
Production

Cast
Lauren Cohan
Greta Evans
Rupert Evans

The English countryside, present day. American Greta Evans is driven to a remote manor house where she will work as a nanny for Mr and Mrs Heelshire. Greta is introduced to the Heelshires' son' Brahms, who is a porcelain doll. The Heelshires leave Greta alone with Brahms while they go on holiday. Greta ignores the instructions for Brahms's care that they have left. Malcolm, who delivers the groceries, explains that the real Brahms died 20 years ago in a fire. While she's preparing to leave for a night out with Malcolm, Greta's clothes disappear and she is locked in the attic. She escapes but continues to ignore the Heelshires' instructions. Brahms knocks on her bedroom door and asks her to play. Greta begins to treat Brahms like a real boy. Mr and Mrs Heelshire commit suicide. Greta's abusive ex-boyfriend Cole arrives and demands she leave with him. He smashes the doll. The real Brahms, who lives in the walls, slashes Cole's throat and bludgeons Malcolm. Greta almost escapes, but goes back to save Malcolm. She stabs Brahms while giving him a goodnight kiss. Malcolm and Greta drive away. Brahms glues the doll back together.

The Choice

USA 2015
Director: Ross Katz
Certificate 12A 110m 50s

Reviewed by Nick Pinkerton

Like most of the presumed readership of this magazine, I've never read a Nicholas Sparks novel, but for the sake of argument, let's assume they're as useless as literature as I assume them to be. This needn't be an insurmountable problem – if we look to the history of Hollywood filmmaking, we can find countless examples of the saccharine being spun into the sublime. And while watching *The Choice*, the 11th feature adaptation of a Sparks book, I found myself wondering what a real director with a free hand might have done with the latest tale of love, loyalty and tested faith to arrive bearing the Sparks imprimatur – what that greatest of the romantics, Frank Borzage, might have managed; or the Clint Eastwood of *The Bridges of Madison County* (1995); or even the Catherine Hardwicke who so perfectly tuned into the adolescent yearning of *Twilight* (2008).

I thought about a lot of things while watching *The Choice*, including wondering if I could afford the upkeep on a small boat like the one that Travis Shaw (Benjamin Walker) uses to zip around the tidal bays of coastal North Carolina; and why Tom Wilkinson, who plays Travis's father Shep, is continually asked to mangle different American accents. The best that can be said for director Ross Katz is that he doesn't ask Wilkinson to wrestle with a Southern drawl, though Georgia-born Walker is all syrupy good-ol'-boy smoothie. In practice, though, one wonders how much of a free hand Katz had at all, for *The Choice* is recognisably by-the-numbers Sparks, the joint product of Nicholas Sparks Productions and Peter and Natalia Safran's Safran Company. (She sings over the closing credits, and their daughter has a small role in the film.)

As ever, at the centre of the film is an indissoluble romantic bond, in this case between Travis and his neighbour Gabby (Teresa Palmer) – they meet cute when she comes to chew him out for interrupting her med-school studies by playing Ram Jam's 'Black Betty' at full volume.



Either oar: Benjamin Walker, Teresa Palmer

Mutual irritation masks mutual attraction, and soon they're having dinner together while he teases her propensity to twirl – "There ya go, spinnin' agin" – but any resemblance *The Choice* bears to a film by Terrence Malick ends right here. Gabby is soon cuckolding her boyfriend without undue hesitation, engaging in (mostly clothed) coitus with Travis, scored to the tweedy moaning of The National and, after obligatory obstacles have been negotiated, finally agreeing to become his wife, letting loose an orgasmic coo when the engagement ring slides on.

It's not entirely clear if Gabby ever does graduate from medical school, but she does bear Travis two strapping children before she is left comatose by a car accident that quite inexplicably is shot in something near the voluptuous slow motion of *Four Flies on Grey Velvet* (1971). Not the slightest hint of ingenuity is employed in the use of the widescreen frame or the scenic coastal locations, and the viewer is never safe for long from philosophical chestnuts along the lines of, "Life is held together by choices, one after another." So it is – and so, if you find yourself watching *The Choice*, you may wonder at the decisions that brought you there. 📺

Credits and Synopsis

Producers Nicholas Sparks Peter Safran Theresa Park	Executive Producer Hans Ritter	Dolby Digital In Colour [2.35:1]
Screenplay Bryan Sipe Based on the novel by Nicholas Sparks	Cast Benjamin Walker Travis Shaw Teresa Palmer Gabby Holland Maggie Grace Steph Alexandra Daddario Monica Tom Welling Ryan Brett Rice Dr McCarthy Brad James Ben Jesse C. Boyd Matt Noree Victoria Liz Anna Enger Megan Ashley LeConte Campbell Maryanne McCarthy Lou Lou Safran Katie Tom Wilkinson Shep	Distributor Lionsgate UK
Director of Photography Alar Kivilo		
Editors Joe Klotz Lucy Donaldson		
Production Designer Mark E. Garner		
Music Marcelo Zarvos		
Sound Mixer Larry Long		
Costume Designer Alex Bovaird		
©Choice Films, LLC Production Companies Lionsgate presents a Nicholas Sparks Productions, The Safran Company, POW! production		

Wrightsville, North Carolina, present day. Visiting the hospital, Travis Shaw recalls his footloose bachelorhood of seven years ago. In flashback we see him as a silver-tongued ladies' man who nevertheless fails to entice his neighbour Gabby, a medical student. She blames Travis's dog for getting her Golden Retriever pregnant; taking the dog for a check-up, she again bumps into Travis, who works in his father's veterinary practice. When Gabby's boyfriend Ryan, a doctor at the hospital, goes away on business, Gabby begins to spend time with Travis. Their casual affair becomes something more serious when Gabby attends a 'birthday party' for Travis's dead mother. Gabby then accompanies Travis on a rowing-boat ride to a secluded island. When Ryan returns, Gabby hesitates to tell him of her infidelity, which causes a rift between her and Travis. After vacillating between Ryan and Travis, Gabby finally breaks off her engagement to Ryan and flees to Charleston, South Carolina, where she grew up. Travis follows and wins her over. They marry and spend seven happy years together, until a car accident leaves her in a coma.

The film returns to the present day. Travis, heartbroken, refuses to switch off Gabby's life support, against her stated wishes. After he stays up all night constructing a gazebo out of driftwood, she miraculously regains consciousness.

The Club

Chile/France 2015
Director: Pablo Larraín

See Feature
on page 28

Reviewed by Tony Rayns

When you think what the British admen of the 1960s and 1970s brought to the cinema when they began making feature films, their Chilean equivalent Pablo Larraín looks like some kind of master. *The Club* is an intensely serious drama about the fallout from the paedophile-priest scandals that have destroyed so much faith in the Catholic Church worldwide. The script is entirely fictional, but Larraín stresses that secret house-prisons for delinquent priests like the one shown in the film do exist, in Chile and elsewhere. What disturbs him most is that the Church cares less for its victims than about saving face and concealing scandal – in a word, safeguarding its own ‘infallibility’, the issue at the core of the film.

The title is sardonic. This ‘club’ is not formally constituted and has few rules. Its members are Catholic priests who have been caught sexually abusing young boys. Rather than defrocking them or allowing them to go to trial, the Church has whisked them out of sight to an anonymous house in a remote seaside town, in effect an open prison which they can leave only for a few hours in the early morning and early evening. This cloistered enclave is disrupted twice, first by the arrival of new ‘inmate’ Father Lazcano, who kills himself on his first day there, and then by the arrival of earnest young priest Garcia, who is ostensibly investigating the suicide but has actually been charged with finding a way to close the place down. The figure who proves central to both disruptions is Sandokan, a mentally unstable man who was sexually abused by Lazcano many years earlier and has followed him from place to place ever since.

Sandokan is central because he’s an embarrassing paradox: a victim whose graphic descriptions of what Lazcano did to him can expose what the house is and why the priests have been secluded there, but also a believer in the Church’s dogma about the sanctity of its priests. Sandokan considers himself touched by God, since whatever a priest emits is by definition holy. (He has occasional sex with women prostitutes, but considers that “dirty”.) Sandokan was in fact destroyed by being sodomised as a boy; he lives in misery and chaos, sustained by massive daily doses of tranquillisers, painkillers and uppers. His pursuit of the priest who violated him (this is what provokes Lazcano’s suicide) is a quest for the ‘purity’ that has been missing all his adult life. Garcia’s ultra-pragmatic solution to the problem of the house – of course, it’s the house’s very existence that is the fundamental problem – is to put Sandokan in charge, creating a perfect *huis clos* that will damn everyone in it to lifelong torment.

As an account of what the Church will do to protect itself, the film should ideally be double-billed with Alex Gibney’s excellent documentary *Mea Maxima Culpa* (2012), which explores the heretical belief that an ordained man becomes intrinsically holy. Father Garcia, the Church’s fixer, who may or may not be gay himself but has clearly held to his vow of celibacy, is in turn bemused, horrified and baffled by what he hears in the house. Larraín constructs two quite lengthy montage sequences from his sessions



Dark habits: Antonia Zegers, Alfredo Castro

questioning the four priests, building not only a picture of their denials and self-delusions but also something more insidious: when the senile Father Ramirez, the oldest ‘inmate’, begins repeating the words he heard from Sandokan about how hard it is for a small boy to fellate a grown man, Garcia wonders aloud if he’s describing a fantasy. But it’s not the absence of penitence that ultimately pushes Garcia into extremist action. Only when the warden Sister Monica (herself compromised by a history of beating the African child she adopted) threatens to go to the press does Garcia come up with the berserk idea of killing all the town’s greyhounds, simply

to snatch away the pleasure the priests take in dog-racing. Buñuel would have understood.

On this evidence, nobody is likely to hail Larraín as a great visual stylist. His Scope compositions are unadventurous and his film language and editing syntax are fundamentally orthodox. The climactic crosscutting between two acts of violence seems to spring from an impulse to produce a ‘punchy’ finale; all it actually brings to the film is a redundant hint of melodrama. But *The Club* is written and acted with great skill and remarkable sensitivity to the warped thought processes of paedophiles and their victims. Catholics are not its only audience. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Juan de Dios Larraín
Screenplay
Pablo Larraín
Guillermo Calderón
Daniel Villalobos
Director of Photography
Sergio Armstrong
Editor
Sebastián Sepúlveda

Art Director
Estefanía Larraín
Original Music
Carlos Cabezas
Sound Designer
Miguel Hormazábal
Costumes
Estefanía Larraín

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Production

Companies
Fabula, Funny
Balloons, Consejo
nacional de la cultura
y las artes - Gobierno
de Chile, Corfo
Executive Producers
Mariane Hartard
Rocio Jadue
Juan Ignacio Correa

Cast
Alfredo Castro
Father Vidal
Roberto Farías
Sandokan
Antonia Zegers
Sister Mónica
Marcelo Alonso
Father Garcia
Jaime Vadell
Father Silva

Alejandro Goic
Father Ortega
Alejandro Sieveking
Father Ramirez
José Soza
Father Lazcano
Francisco Reyes
Father Alfonso

Subtitles

Distributor
Network Releasing

Chilean theatrical title
El club

In Colour
[2.35:1]

Chile, the present. Four gay paedophile Catholic priests, Fathers Vidal, Silva, Ortega and Ramirez, are semi-confined in an isolated house in the seaside town La Boca, under the supervision of the also compromised Sister Monica. Their main pleasure is racing Rayo, a greyhound they have adopted. Father Lazcano is brought to the house to join them but is followed by the homeless Sandokan, who stands at the gate loudly declaiming what happened in his boyhood, when Lazcano sodomised him. The others give Lazcano a gun and send him out to silence Sandokan, but Lazcano shoots himself. The earnest young Father Garcia is brought to the house to investigate the incident, with a view to closing the place and returning the men to their communities.

His conversations with the priests reveal a miasma of denials, fantasies, evasions and lies but no penitence. He bans alcohol from the house. Sensing that Sandokan poses a threat to their survival, Vidal tries to befriend him, and later foolishly tries to bribe two young surfers to attack him. With Monica’s connivance, Garcia plots the killings of all the town’s racing dogs, including Rayo. The townspeople blame outsider Sandokan for the killings and beat him up. Shocked, Garcia carries Sandokan to the house – and announces that the others can stay there on condition that Sandokan moves in permanently. Sandokan explains the regimen of uppers and downers he needs to keep going, and threatens dire consequences if anyone pilfers his stash. Garcia returns to Santiago.

Dad's Army

United Kingdom/USA 2015
Director: Oliver Parker
Certificate PG 99m 56s

Reviewed by Kate Stables


Even as it recedes gently from the top rankings in those periodic 'best of British sitcom' polls, the classic Home Guard comedy show *Dad's Army* (1968-77) can draw on a deep well of national affection. After all, the full 80 episodes and their faithful radio adaptations are still hardy perennials on UK digital channels. A curious choice for a big-screen remake, then, since it's an object of such standing that a campy *The Brady Bunch Movie*-style makeover would be sacrilegious. Even the 1971 film spin-off conscientiously modelled itself on the show's early episodes. So in the style of Corporal Jones, a bleated "Don't panic!" is director Oliver Parker's repeated message to the audience, as this feeble but cosy screen adaptation attempts a wholesale recreation of the original series.

The familiar themes are laid on with a trowel: Captain Mainwaring's class conflict with public schoolboy Sergeant Wilson (though Bill Nighy can't muster the necessary posh diffidence in the latter role); the gap between national crisis and small-town slapstick adventures (here, rounding up a rogue Hereford instead of the Hun); the insubordinate ineptitude of gloomy Frazer, flapping Jones, naive Pike, gentle Godfrey and spivvy Walker. But along with the carefully dowdy high street of tearooms and ration queues ("You just slipped her a sausage!"), this all feels like a laboured homage.

What's utterly lacking is the kind of clever, character-driven farce plotting that the show's creators David Croft and Jimmy Perry excelled at. In its place is a flimsy Mainwaring-and-Mata-Hari story in which Catherine Zeta-Jones's wooden temptress Rose Winters attempts to spy on the D-Day invasion force. She's the most visible of an influx of women, also including Sarah Lancashire's stand-by-your-man Mavis Pike, shipped in to update the boyish japer. Why the filmmakers undertook this kind of tweaking rather than provide the film with a sturdier plot is a mystery (Rose's journalist

cover is so threadbare that the Misses Godfrey, Walmington-on-Sea's answer to Miss Marple, blow it with a single phone call to *The Lady*).

Screenwriter Hamish McColl paid deft tribute to classic British TV on stage with the Morecambe and Wise outing *The Play What I Wrote*. But his scripting here, both plot and dialogue, has an unintended air of pastiche, creating a world barely tethered to reality. Combined with the relentless celebrity casting, the final effect is that of watching an endless Comic Relief sketch, in which Tom Courtenay, Bill Paterson and Michael Gambon gamely impersonate Messrs Dunn, Laurie and Ridley. Only Toby Jones, showing a poignancy that Arthur Lowe never found in the bristling Mainwaring, delivers something unexpected. Less happily, Mark Gatiss's drawling, snobby colonel is where the film tips into careless caricature.

Cultural historian Jeffrey Richards found traces of Dickens and Shakespeare's comic crews in the original *Dad's Army*, and put its enduring success down to British hankering for the solidarity of a gentler age. This 21st-century *Dad's Army* movie is positively giddy with nostalgia both for the 'Keep Calm and Carry On' view of WWII's gallant little Britain and for the cosy 70s comedy that contributed to a mythic picture of the nation's Home Front pluck. But despite its fond and slavish mimicry, it never amounts to more than a pale, cartoonish copy of the richly characterised original, still beloved as 'Our Finest Half-Hour'. 



Soldiering on: *Dad's Army*

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Damian Jones
Screenplay
Hamish McColl
Based on characters created by Jimmy Perry, David Croft
Based on an idea by Jimmy Perry
Director of Photography
Christopher Ross
Editor
Guy Bensley
Production Designer
Simon Bowles
Music by/Music Produced by
Charlie Mole

Sound Recordist
Martin Beresford
Costume Designer
Dinah Collin

©Stupid Boy Ltd/
Universal City Studios
Productions, LLLP
Production Companies
Universal Pictures
International and
Screen Yorkshire
present a DJ Films
production in
association with
British Film Company,
Worldwide Theatrical

and Jimmy Perry
Productions
In association with
M7 Alternative
Investments LLP
Developed in
association with
Pathé
Produced in
collaboration
with Wiggan EP
Executive Producers
Hugo Heppell
Josephine Rose
Miles Ketley
Ann Croft
Jimmy Perry
Penny Croft
Steve Milne

Christian Eisenbeiss
Alan Parker

Cast

Bill Nighy
Sergeant Arthur Wilson
Catherine Zeta-Jones
Rose Winters
Toby Jones
Captain George Mainwaring
Tom Courtenay
Lance-Corporal Jack Jones
Michael Gambon

Private Charles Godfrey
Blake Harrison
Private Frank Pike
Daniel Mays
Private Joe Walker
Bill Paterson
Private James Frazer
Felicity Montagu
Elizabeth Mainwaring
Alison Steadman
Mrs Fox
Holli Dempsey
Vera, Pike's girlfriend
Emily Atack
Daphne
Mark Gatiss
Colonel Theakes
Annette Crosbie

Cissy Godfrey
Ian Lavender
Brigadier Pritchard
Frank Williams
vicar
Sarah Lancashire
Mrs Mavis Pike
Julia Foster
Dolly Godfrey

In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
Universal Pictures
International
UK & Ire

Walmington-on-Sea, 1944. The town's Home Guard platoon is ordered to guard the Allied invasion base at Dover. Journalist Rose Winter arrives to write a profile for 'The Lady' magazine, but she is secretly a German spy. Captain Mainwaring and Sergeant Wilson (an old beau of hers) compete for her affections. Rose plays them both along to gain information. MI5 warns of a spy in the locality. A cliff-top rescue of Lance-Corporal Jones during a patrol accidentally reveals that the Dover base is a fake. Mainwaring, disgraced, is demoted. Rose convinces him that Wilson is the

spy, and Wilson is held prisoner by the platoon. The Misses Godfrey work out the truth about Rose and Wilson is freed. Mistaking Mainwaring for Churchill, a U-boat surfaces to take him and Rose away. Wilson and the platoon rush to the beach to save him. Wilson rescues Private Pike and his girlfriend Vera, who has been held hostage. Mainwaring captures Rose in the water while the platoon distracts and overpowers the German landing party by crashing a lorryload of hooch into them. Reinstated, Mainwaring leads the platoon through the town at the head of a parade.

Dark Places

USA/France 2014
Director: Gilles Paquet-Brenner
Certificate 15 112m 29s

Reviewed by Kim Newman

With cropped hair under a baseball cap that's perpetually pulled down over wary eyes, Charlize Theron downplays her natural glamour to incarnate the damaged but determined protagonist of *Dark Places*. She gives a performance of considerable subtlety, let down by the barking-mad melodrama of director Gilles Paquet-Brenner's script from a novel by Gillian Flynn. Theron also has to play against a cast of one-note grotesques plainly having a lot more fun not taking this nonsense seriously.

Early on, in one of the film's many clumsy attempts at getting its complex backstory across, a fatherly lawyer/manager (Glenn Morshower) – hauled in for one expository lump and then never seen again – performs the service of explaining to the heroine things she must already know but that the audience needs to catch up on: the money from a charitable appeal in support of this once waif-like survivor of a farmhouse massacre has run out and there's no more income from the true-crime book she is supposed to have written but actually hasn't even read. This economic desperation echoes her dead mother's predicament, though both women take ridiculous, obviously dangerous ways out of all-too-real problems – by essentially inviting the attention of actual and potential serial killers.

We can tell that Theron's Libby Day has baggage because it's all on the screen. Her small city home is filled to overflowing with the furniture and clutter that once had room to breathe in the spacious if impoverished country farmhouse seen in extensive flashbacks. It's typical of Paquet-Brenner's struggle with the material that these flashbacks are sometimes Libby's memories becoming clear, sometimes illustrations of things she is told by witnesses (though they are mostly duplicitous and what we see on screen is intended as objective truth) and sometimes just edited in despite the fact that the viewpoint character couldn't possibly know what happened when she wasn't there.

To cap it off, following a climax in which Libby stumbles out of danger into the arms of the under-characterised semi-stalker who turns out to be the film's hero, the plot resolution is conveyed by cutting to a TV report. Newsreaders inform us that three separate villains have been undramatically arrested off screen. And a decades-old unjust conviction is magically overturned in the way any viewer of the documentary *The Fear of 13* knows doesn't happen. Given the high profile of the film version of Flynn's *Gone Girl*, it might have been surprising that this arrived under the radar – after a protracted production and a long delay. In the event, everything about *Dark Places*, from the bland title (used on a Joan Collins-Christopher Lee spooky mystery in 1973) to the murky look, suggests a project that isn't coming together as anyone hoped.

There are camp compensations. Nicholas Hoult twitches as red-herring crime buff Lyle, obsessed with unsolved mysteries since he started a brush fire that ravaged California; and Sean Bridgers lurches menacingly as the deadbeat dad as intent on roughing up his daughter for small change as he was on robbing her mother. Chloë Grace Moretz, in red lipstick and satanic



Memory gloss: Charlize Theron

slut outfits, is entertainingly demented as the psycho teen queen in the flashbacks – a performance nicely matched by Andrea Roth as the character grown up and Denise Williamson as the next generation of princessy maniac. 📌

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Stéphane Marsil
Charlize Theron
A.J. Dix
Beth Kono
Matt Jackson
Azim Bolkiah
Matthew Rhodes
Cathy Schulman
Written for the Screen by
Gilles Paquet-Brenner
Based on the novel by Gillian Flynn
Director of Photography
Barry Ackroyd
Edited by
Billy Fox
Douglas Crise
Production Designer
Laurence Bennett
Music
BT
Production Sound Mixer
Steve Aaron
Costume Designer
April Napier

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Production Companies

Exclusive Media
presents a Denver & DeLilah Films, Hugo Productions and Mandalay Pictures production
In association with Cuatro Plus Films/
Rio Negro Financing
Exclusive Media
Financing provided in association with Sleepydog Ltd
Executive Producers
Peter Safran
Ginger Sledge
Jillian Longnecker
Tobin Armbrust
Guy East
Nigel Sinclair
Alex Brunner
Matthias Ehrenberg
José Levy
Nicolas Veinberg
Jeff Rice
Toby Moores
Oswaldo Rios
Rob Weston

Cast
Charlize Theron
Libby Day
Nicholas Hoult

Lyle Worth
Chloë Grace Moretz
young Diondra
Tye Sheridan
young Ben Day
Sterling Jerins
young Libby Day
Corey Stoll
Ben Day
Glenn Morshower
Jim Jeffreys
Christina Hendricks
Patty Day
Shannon Kook
young Trey Teepano
Drea DeMatteo
Krissi Cates
Sean Bridges
Runner Day
Denise Williamson
Crystal
Natalie Precht
Michelle Day
Madison McGuire
Debby Day
Andrea Roth
Diondra

Dolby Digital
In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
E! Films

Kansas City, the present. Lyle Wirth pays the cash-strapped Libby Day to talk with his group of amateur crime-solvers about the 1985 murders of her mother Patty and sisters Michelle and Debby. Young Libby's testimony ensured that her brother Ben was found guilty of the crimes, and he has never appealed the conviction – but Lyle and his group persuade the still traumatised Libby to reassess her confused memories. Libby visits Ben in prison, and also interviews her derelict father Runner and Ben's tearaway friend Trey. She remembers that Patty was facing the seemingly inevitable repossession of the family farm just before the killings, and that Ben was drawn into sham satanic rituals by his newly pregnant girlfriend Diondra. Libby learns that a child-molestation incident that told against Ben in court was down to the fabricated testimony of a schoolgirl with a crush, Krissi Cates. Tracking down Diondra, Libby meets Ben's daughter Crystal. Libby realises that her mother and Debby were murdered by 'The Angel of Debt', a contract killer who hires out his services to financially desperate people who want their life insurance money to go to their relatives. However, Michelle was strangled by the unstable Diondra. Ben, ordered to kill Libby, is responsible for saving her life. Diondra and Crystal try to kill Libby, but she escapes with Lyle's help. Ben, who has kept quiet to protect his daughter, is pardoned.

Deadpool

USA/New Zealand 2016
Director: Tim Miller
Certificate 15 107m 59s

Reviewed by Kim Newman

Less a spin-off from Marvel/Fox's *X-Men* film franchise than a footnote to it, *Deadpool* is testament to a niche character's unkillability – both as part of his Wolverine-style power set and, appropriately given his self-awareness as a comic-book creation, his status as one of Marvel's busiest, most popular characters. Writer Joe Kelly, who worked on the defining 1990s run of the title, said, "With *Deadpool*, we could do anything we wanted because everybody just expected the book to be cancelled every five seconds."

Ryan Reynolds first played Wade Wilson/Deadpool in the little-liked *X-Men Origins: Wolverine* (2009), when the 'merc with a mouth' was roped in to support Hugh Jackman's established hero and essentially used up and discarded. Reynolds saw enough in the 'fan favourite' character to appear in a mock trailer in which he played Deadpool in a costume – and with an attitude – closer in tone to the comics than the muted version of *Wolverine*. The star stayed attached to the long-in-development project, despite crossing the lines to play Green Lantern, an icon from the rival DC stable of superheroes. Also little liked, 2011's *Green Lantern* film comes in for ribbing here, as Wade Wilson, about to undergo the agonising process that will transform him into a superhero, insists his super-suit "not be green – or animated". It's easy to see why Reynolds would stick with *Deadpool*. His screen persona of jittery, fast-talking, gross-out, secretly mush-hearted overgrown kid was a poor fit for *Green Lantern*, but is much closer to the wilfully obnoxious Wade Wilson.

Though the film has a high, gruesome body count and stresses *Deadpool*'s know-all wisecracking, it still tones down the comic. Here, for example, Blind Al (Leslie Uggams), *Deadpool*'s roommate, is a tough-talking, take-no-shit little old lady – but she hasn't been abducted and forced to



share an apartment by a maniacal gerontophile. *Deadpool* keeps insisting he's no hero, and makes jibes about the goody-goody X-Men, reflecting the way Marvel and DC comics in the 1990s became uncomfortable with the fundamental principles of their universes. Ironically, this also means that a screen hero still stuck with *Van Wilder* shtick from 2002 feels passé set beside the reinvention of more lasting characters in other branches of Marvel's movie empire, such as Spider-Man, Captain America and Iron Man, who reaffirm idealism as an admirable value.

In comics terms, Ant-Man's a nobody and *Deadpool*'s a superstar – but last year's *Ant-Man* film managed self-deprecating humour alongside imaginative action and a core human drama, whereas this mostly succeeds in being obnoxious and hectic. First-time director Tim Miller (whose previous credits are animated shorts) and screenwriters Rhett Reese and Paul Wernick (*GI Joe: Retaliation*, *Zombieland*) competently toss superpowered fight scenes peppered with one-liners, but they incline to overkill in other areas. Wade's relationship with girlfriend Vanessa (Morena Baccarin) is a year-long montage of sex acts timed to Neil Sedaka's 'Calendar Girl' – including Vanessa taking a strap-on to him for International Women's Day. Similarly, in a creepily disturbing parallel, the tortures designed to kickstart Wade's mutating ability go on long after the point has been made.

Like a lot of *Deadpool* comics, this traps a big character in a small story and reduces everyone else in Wade's life to the role of stooge or punch-bag. The winning Baccarin in particular deserves better than bending over in sexy outfits, smiling adorably at mean jokes and being locked in a torture capsule; Vanessa's line from the trailer about not being a damsel in distress has been dropped from the film – presumably because the makers realised she'd become exactly that. A post-credits sting promises *Deadpool 2* with Cable, Marvel's second-most-tired held-over-from-the-90s character as co-star. Let's hope that's just an in-joke... you know, for the fans. 📌

Ryan Reynolds

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Simon Kinberg
Ryan Reynolds
Lauren Shuler Donner
Written by
Rhett Reese
Paul Wernick
Director of Photography
Ken Seng
Film Editor
Julian Clarke
Production Designer
Sean Haworth
Music
Tom Holkenborg

Sound Mixer
David Husby
Costume Designer
Angus Strathie
Visual Effects and Animation
Digital Domain
Atomic Fiction
Weta Digital Limited
Visual Effects
RodeoFX
Luma Pictures
Stunt Co-ordinators
Robert Alonzo
Philip J Silvera

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Production Companies
Twentieth Century Fox presents in association with Marvel Entertainment a Kinberg Genre/The Donners' Company production
In association with TSG Entertainment

Executive Producers
Stan Lee
John J. Kelly
Jonathon Komack Martin
Aditya Sood
Rhett Reese
Paul Wernick

Cast
Ryan Reynolds
Wade Wilson, 'Deadpool'
Morena Baccarin
Vanessa Carlyle

Ed Skrein
Francis Freeman, 'Ajax'
T.J. Miller
Weasel
Gina Carano
Christine, 'Angel Dust'
Leslie Uggams
Blind Al
Brianna Hildebrand
Ellie Phimister, 'Negasonic Teenage Warhead'
Karan Soni
Dopinder
Jed Rees
The Recruiter

Stefan Kapicic
voice of Piotr Rasputin, 'Colossus'
Randal Reeder
Buck
Isaac C. Singleton Jr
Boothie

Dolby Atmos
In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
20th Century Fox International (UK)

Wade Wilson is a low-level urban mercenary who finds some redemption in his relationship with hooker-turned-waitress Vanessa. Diagnosed with terminal cancer, Wade joins a secret programme whereby he is cured and given regenerative powers and super reflexes. A side effect is that he becomes hideously disfigured. Learning that project director Francis Freeman (aka Ajax) intends to sell him into slavery, Wade escapes and lets Vanessa believe he has died.

Taking the name *Deadpool* and wearing a mask to hide his disfigurement, Wade wages war on Freeman's organisation. He is on the point of killing his enemy when Colossus and Negasonic Teenage Warhead – of the X-Men superhero group – intervene to curb his violent behaviour. Freeman kidnaps Vanessa to draw Wade out. Colossus and Negasonic Teenage Warhead are obliged to help *Deadpool* rescue his girlfriend and defeat the villain. Wade and Vanessa are reunited.

Disorder

France/Belgium 2015
Director: Alice Winocour
Certificate 15 98m 23s

See interview
on page 11

Reviewed by Philip Kemp

French director Alice Winocour's first feature *Augustine* (2012) was a fictionalised account of the relationship between the 19th-century neurologist Jean-Martin Charcot (whose work influenced Freud) and one of his most famous patients, the eponymous young housemaid who was brought to him suffering from psychosomatic paralysis. The film took a critical, feminist stance toward Charcot's work, influential though it was; treating exclusively female patients, he ascribed all their symptoms (however diverse) to 'ovarian hysteria'. Winocour's new film *Disorder* also deals with a widely diagnosed mental disturbance, in this case post-traumatic stress disorder; but what starts out as if to examine Afghanistan veteran Vincent Loreau's inner turmoil from a similarly sympathetic angle mutates midway through into standard-issue home-invasion thriller. The two elements never meld properly.

The most striking aspect of the film, along with Matthias Schoenaerts's tormented performance as Vincent, is the sound design. Working with techno artist Mike Lévy, known as Gesaffelstein, Winocour sets out to place us inside the disturbed veteran's head, deploying sonic distortions, seismic snarls, muffled percussive rhythms and atonal sideslips to suggest a mind constantly struggling to retain a hold on reality. Georges Lechartois's photography likewise plays tricks with perception – variable speed levels, disturbing angles and lighting effects, faces floating in and out of focus – to achieve what Winocour calls "a mechanical progressive derealisation of the film". The aim is to make us doubt how much of the menace to Jessie (Diane Kruger), trophy wife of the Lebanese millionaire whose villa Vincent is guarding, and their young son is genuine and how much the subjective product of Vincent's paranoid mind.

This would be an interesting proposition to explore, were it sustained. But with the arrival of a



Stress test: Diane Kruger, Matthias Schoenaerts

group of black-clad, black-masked terrorists – who quite evidently are real, since others (Jessie, her son Ali, Vincent's comrade Denis) perceive them too – all questions of 'just in his mind?' vanish, and we're left with home-invasion melodrama: competently done and well choreographed but nothing exceptional. Only in the final moment of the film, as Vincent sees off Jessie, Ali and Denis in a taxi for the airport and steps back into the house, does a hint of ambiguity slip in again: a shadowy, faceless female figure embraces him from behind. It's an image at once comforting and disquieting – death, or some suppressed memory from Afghanistan? – but unfortunately it comes rather too late.

The mutual unspoken attraction between Vincent and Jessie never ignites as it should – partly because Jessie's role is seriously underwritten and partly because it's all too predictable. The best moment in this strand comes when Denis, an altogether more relaxed individual than his comrade, starts light-heartedly flirting with Jessie, who responds with amusement. Vincent watches them, his face expressing a complex range of conflicting emotions – envy, jealousy, perhaps even a hint of repulsion. Again, these are avenues that could be fruitfully explored – but then all the lights go out and the climactic action sequence erupts. Winocour's second feature suggests impressive potential – but she should perhaps steer clear of formula. Ⓜ

Eddie the Eagle

Director: Dexter Fletcher
Certificate PG 105m 31s

Reviewed by Matthew Taylor

Eddie 'The Eagle' Edwards was one of British sporting lore's most doggedly unbowed failures, so it was probably only a matter of time before he received the biopic treatment. A latter-day staple of eye-rolling 1980s clip shows, usually spliced alongside the likes of Roland Rat, Shakin' Stevens or Neil Kinnock falling over on a beach, the plasterer-turned-ski-jumper from Cheltenham – with his thick glasses, fuzzy moustache and beatific gurn – seems almost custom-built for the sort of crowd-pleasing underdog comedy that Dexter Fletcher's breezy film exemplifies.

Perhaps aware that Edwards's never-say-die trajectory has a universal quality, Fletcher and writers Sean Macaulay and Simon Kelton play loose with the facts of his life (Edwards has stated that most of the script is fabricated). Mercifully unchanged, however, is Eddie's coming last in each of his Olympic events, his indefatigability endearing him to the public and media. The major invention comes in the form of Hugh Jackman's coach, a character blatantly inserted to generate otherwise absent themes of conflict and redemption. But while contrived, it's arguable that the film's exaggeratedly broad approach may serve Edwards – a perpetual dreamer, after all – better than a more strait-laced handling would have done.

It's not difficult to imagine what drew Fletcher to Edwards's story – his debut *Wild Bill* (2011) revolved around a man determined to prove his worth after being written off by all and sundry, while 2013's *Sunshine on Leith*, an adaptation of The Proclaimers' jukebox musical, charted an emotive struggle against adversity. In some brisk early scenes here, Fletcher establishes how the young Eddie (Taron Egerton) grows obsessed with becoming an Olympic athlete. It's a dream that chafes with his pragmatic dad (Keith Allen), who urges him to relent and join the family plastering business. Rejected by the British ski team's disdainful chief (a dependably smarmy Tim McInnerny), he turns instead to the outré world of ski jumping, a sport that a Briton hadn't competed in since 1929.

Venturing to a Bavarian training outpost in the hope of qualifying for the 1988 Winter Olympics in Calgary, Eddie is a hapless naïf among the more experienced participants. One of these is Jackman's Bronson Peary, a once celebrated ski jumper who now works as the camp's snowplough driver. Boozy and irascible where Eddie is meek and teetotal, Peary becomes a reluctant mentor to the gormless young novice, getting his own mojo back in the process.

Egerton's enthusiastic mugging, chin permanently jutting out – echoing *Some Mothers Do 'Ave 'Em*'s Frank Spencer – can verge on the overemphatic. Likewise the bawdy sequences that are played for laughs at Eddie's expense: his cowering in the face of a coquettish bar owner's suggestive overtures; an awkward standoff with the conspicuously naked Norwegian team in a steam room; Peary vigorously advising the virginal Eddie to equate ski jumping with bedding Bo Derek (a far cry from the transcendent 'great ecstasy' of Woodcarver Steiner in Werner Herzog's 1974 documentary).

The coach-pupil sparring between Eddie

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Isabelle Madeline
Émilie Tisné
Written by
Alice Winocour
with the collaboration
of Jean-Stéphane
Bron
**Director of
Photography**
George Lechartois
Editor
Julien Lacheray
Production Designer
Samuel Deshors
Original Music
Gesaffelstein
Sound
Pierre André
Gwenolé Le Borgne
Marc Doisne
Costume Designer
Pascale Chavanne

©Dharamsala, Darius
Films, Mars Films,
France 3 Cinéma,
Scope Pictures
**Production
Companies**
Dharamsala and
Darius Films present

in co-production
with Mars Films,
France 3 Cinéma
and Scope Pictures
in association
with Indie Sales
and Indie Invest
and the support
of Tax Shelter du
Gouvernement
Fédéral Belge via
Scope Invest
With the participation
of Canal+ and
Ciné+ and of France
Télévisions, Centre
National du Cinéma
et de l'Image Animée
and the support of
La Région Provence-
Alpes-Côte d'Azur
in partnership
with the CNC
A film by Alice
Winocour
A film produced
by Dharamsala
and Darius Films
In collaboration with
the Maison de l'Image
Basse-Normandie

Cast
Matthias
Schoenaerts
Vincent Loreau
Diane Kruger
Jessie
Paul Hamy
Denis
Percy Kemp
Imad Whalid
Zaid Errougui-
Dmonsant
Ali

In Colour
[1.85:1]
Subtitles

Distributor
Soda Pictures

French theatrical title
Maryland

Southern France, present day. Soldier Vincent Loreau has returned from Afghanistan suffering from PTSD and may be discharged from the forces. While awaiting the decision, Vincent is invited by fellow soldier Denis to join a team providing security for a wealthy Lebanese man, Imad Whalid, who's hosting a party at his Cap d'Antibes villa. During the party, Vincent overhears enough to gather that Whalid is under pressure regarding a deal involving arms shipments. The next day, Whalid leaves on a business trip; Denis offers Vincent the job of guarding Whalid's German wife Jessie and their son Ali.

Vincent gradually strikes up a relationship with Jessie and Ali. He takes them to the beach. As they're driving home, the car is attacked by two masked, black-clad figures; Vincent shoots them. The police question him and Jessie, and promise to keep watch on the house. Back at the house, all the servants have vanished. News comes that Whalid has been arrested at the Swiss border. During the night the police patrol is withdrawn; Vincent summons Denis to come and help. He advises Jessie to fly to Canada, where she has friends. The lights and alarms are cut off and more black-clad men invade the house. Vincent kills them all, the last of them with extreme brutality in front of Jessie. The next day, Jessie and Ali leave for Canada; Vincent, who had planned to accompany them, asks Denis to go instead.



Jump leads: Taron Egerton, Hugh Jackman

and Peary hews closely to the formula of sports movies past – especially the similarly jocular *Cool Runnings* (1993), whose real-life Jamaican bobsleigh team also starred at Calgary – while Peary's redemptive arc offers little in the way of surprises. That's not to say it isn't diverting enough, though you feel on occasion that Fletcher struggles to fill out the material building up to Eddie's two weeks of infamy in Canada. Where he does excel is in portraying the sport's perilous nature, capturing the jump sequences from imaginative angles and queasy point-of-view shots. Another plus is Matthew Margeson's synth score, which adds period-appropriate propulsion while channelling both Vangelis and Van Halen. Ⓢ

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Matthew Vaughn
Adam Bohling
David Reid
Rupert Maconick
Valerie Van Galder

Screenplay
Sean Macaulay
Simon Kelton
Story
Simon Kelton
Based on the life story of Eddie Edwards

Director of Photography
George Richmond

Edited by
Martin Walsh
Production Designer
Mike Gunn

Music
Composed by
Matthew Margeson
Sound Design
Matthew Collinge
Costume Designer
Annie Hardinge

Production Companies
Lionsgate presents in association with MARV a Matthew Vaughn production with Studio Babelsberg and Saville Productions Made in association with TSG Entertainment Produced with the support of DFFF - Deutscher Filmförderfonds
Executive Producers
Stephen Marks
Claudia Vaughn
Pierre Lagrange
Peter Morton
Zygi Kamasa

Cast
Taron Egerton
Michael Edwards
, 'Eddie Edwards',

'Eddie the Eagle'
Iris Berben
Petra
Tim McInnerny
Dustin Target
Hugh Jackman
Bronson Peary
Keith Allen
Terry Edwards
Mark Benton
Richmond the British Olympic Association official
Jo Hartley
Janette
Christopher Walken
Warren Sharp

Dolby Digital
In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
Lionsgate UK

Cheltenham, 1984. Since childhood, Eddie Edwards has dreamt of becoming an Olympic skier. Defying his father, who wants him to join the family plastering business, Eddie tries out for the British Olympic ski team but performs poorly and is rejected. In 1987, Eddie turns his mind to ski jumping, travelling to Germany to train in the hope of qualifying for the 1988 Olympics in Calgary. He befriends snowplough driver Bronson Peary, a washed-up former ski-jump star. On witnessing Eddie's fearless – and injurious – attempts at jumping, Peary agrees to be his coach. After completing a 70m jump for the first time, Eddie learns that he has qualified for Calgary. At the Olympics, Eddie comes last in both the 70m and 90m jumps, but nevertheless registers a new British distance record. He becomes a crowd favourite and media sensation, much to the chagrin of the snobbish British officials. Peary reconciles with his own estranged former coach.

Fifty Shades of Black

USA 2016

Director: Michael Tiddes

Certificate 15 91m 48s

Reviewed by Nick Pinkerton

How do you parody a text that is beyond the bounds of parody? This is the question raised by Michael Tiddes and Marlon Wayans's *Fifty Shades of Black*, a race-swap send-up of E.L. James's BDSM romance bestseller and its 2015 movie adaptation by Sam Taylor-Johnson.

James's book is infamously dreadfully written, and features a narrator who, during her introduction to the mysteries of submissive sex, makes internal-monologue observations such as, "My inner goddess is doing the merengue with some salsa moves." Those who've made an argument for Taylor-Johnson's film have tended to do so, like the boosters of David Fincher's *Gone Girl*, by reclaiming it as a self-aware auto-parody, but in neither case have these arguments held much water for this critic. And while *Fifty Shades of Black* isn't a wholly successful movie, it does accost and shake down the source material in ways far more satisfying than anything that occurs in the official adaptation, not omitting to note the utter wretchedness of James's writing. When Christian Black (Wayans) enlists Hannah (Kali Hawk) to submit to the most painful torture imaginable, what should he do but harness her up and read to her from *Fifty Shades of Grey*?

The film, co-written by Wayans and Rick Alvarez and directed by Tiddes, who previously worked with Wayans on the *A Haunted House* spoofs, sticks fairly closely to the plot of the James/Taylor-Johnson texts, while digressing occasionally into flashbacks that allow for references to the *Magic Mike* movies and, oddly, *Whiplash* (2014). Most of the jokes can be separated into three categories. The first, prevalent early on, is dedicated to cracks exaggerating the plain Jane-ness of James's protagonist, here elevated to the level of body horror: she has a musky 'outie' belly button and hirsute thighs, and her panties cling to the wall when flung aside. The tables turn somewhat after Black prematurely ejaculates while relieving Hannah of her virginity, and the movie proceeds to recast the superstar 'Christian Grey' as a



Tortured soul: Kali Hawk, Marlon Wayans

sexually stunted demi-man cursed with two-pump-chump stamina and a mosquito-bite micro-penis. (This in contrast to his adoptive brother, played by Affion Crockett, who swings around an elephant appendage, essentially reprising a gag from 1998's *BASEketball*.) Lastly, *Fifty Shades of Black* undercuts the privilege-porn aspect of the James/Taylor-Johnson *Grey*, goofing on sadomasochistic chic in movies as an essentially upper-class and Caucasian pastime; meanwhile the whips in Mr Black's custom collection refer to a very different screen legacy, being named for prestige slavery pictures.

The rubber-faced and wholly shameless Wayans has produced some deceptively incisive race-based burlesque, from *Don't Be a Menace to South Central While Drinking Your Juice in the Hood* (1996) to *White Chicks* (2004) and *Little Man* (2006), and at the very least he goes down mugging here. Co-star Hawk is likewise dead game, while failing to efface the memory of Anna Faris in the Wayans siblings' *Scary Movie* films, and Mike Epps has a memorable walk-on as one of Hannah's flock of stepfathers. ("It takes a village, when it comes to your mom being a gutter-slut. And the village is a gang-bang.") In the final tally, however, there just isn't enough premium material to recommend *Fifty Shades of Black* as something more than a cultural curio – a relic whose existence will some day be just as inexplicable as that of its source material. Ⓢ

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Marlon Wayans
Rick Alvarez
Written by
Marlon Wayans
Rick Alvarez

Director of Photography
David Ortikese
Editor
Lawrence Jordan
Production Designer
Ermano
DiFebo-Orsini
Music
Jim Dooley
Production
Sound Mixer
David Parker
Costume Designer
Aryela Wald-Cohain

©Fifty Shades Productions, LLC.
Production Companies
IM Global presents a Baby Way production
Executive Producers

Stuart Ford
Matt Jackson
Glendon Palmer
Paddy Cullen
Steve Squillante

Cast
Marlon Wayans
Christian Black
Kali Hawk
Hannah Steele
Affion Crockett
Eli Black
Jane Seymour
Claire Black
Andrew Bachelor
Jesse
Florence Henderson
Mrs Robinson
Jenny Zigrino
Kateesha
Fred Willard
Gary
Mike Epps
Ron

In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
Vertigo Films

Seattle, present day. When her roommate Kateesha is bedridden with syphilis, shy undergraduate Hannah steps in to replace her in a scheduled interview with reclusive businessman Christian Black. Afterwards, Black appears at the hardware store where Hannah works and makes suspicious and sinister purchases; he begins courting Hannah. One evening Hannah drunk-dials Black, and he spirits her away to his luxurious bachelor apartment. The following day he relieves her of her virginity, then introduces her to his BDSM dungeon, offering her a contract to become his submissive. Between lovemaking sessions, each one some manner of a disaster, Christian reveals his troubled past, which includes an early affair with an older music teacher and a stint as a male stripper. Hannah meets Christian's adoptive siblings, including Eli, who takes up with Kateesha. Christian, speaking at Hannah's college graduation, meets one of her many stepfathers. Finally, one of their lovemaking sessions goes too far, and Hannah walks out; to persuade her to come back, Christian agrees to submit to punishment himself, and she sodomises him with an enormous dildo. Reconciled, they go on holiday, travelling coach, much to her disappointment.

The Finest Hours

USA 2016
Director: Craig Gillespie
Certificate 12A 117m 8s

Reviewed by Sam Davies

There's something deeply old-fashioned about *The Finest Hours*, beginning with its name, which immediately suggests a stiff-backed but misty-eyed early-1950s tribute to the Greatest Generation and its exploits on air, land and sea. Nor is that a completely misleading association; the backdrop is 1952 not 1945, and the coastline is New England not Normandy, but bravery and sacrifice in the service of your country are the order of the day. Based on real events, *The Finest Hours* follows the ordeal of an oil-tanker crew as their ship splits in half off the Massachusetts coast and the exploits of the Coast Guard officers sent out to save them. Unfortunately, *The Finest Hours* also shares with that post-war genre a paradoxical quality, in that for all its honourable determination to memorialise its subjects, it's a profoundly forgettable film.

Just one element identifies this as undeniably a product of 2016, and that's the water, which director Craig Gillespie (*Million Dollar Arm*, *Lars and the Real Girl*) does everything he can to immerse the viewer in. The audience is flung in 3D through immaculately modelled 40ft waves and tumbled through heaving CGI chasms of water; it's enough to have James Cameron making irritable notes for *Titanic* reshoots. One nicely turned shot has the camera backing through a door, focusing on a seaman's face as he realises that on the other side lies a long drop into the North Atlantic rather than, as he was expecting, the other half of the tanker.

Past the white-water ride of the FX, though, ideas are in shorter supply. As that title makes clear from the outset, this is not a film about an embarrassing episode in the history of the US Coast Guard, and with the happy ending never in doubt, Gillespie is left to depend on characterisation to turn visible jeopardy into memorable drama. For all its strengths, Tom McCarthy's recent *Spotlight* suffers from the occasional flat scene, in which decent people are saying decent things and the dramatic tension ebbs away. In *The Finest Hours* a similar

flatness stretches across entire reels. Conflict and antagonism are left on a low simmer: Eric Bana as Cluff, the commanding officer of Chris Pine's hero Bernie Webber, is stubbornly clueless rather than the villain of the piece; the locals who question Webber's bravery restrict themselves to passive-aggressive mutters.

As the tanker falls apart, the film ploughs mechanically on, with only Pine's performance introducing an element of uncertainty. Like Robert Ryan in Jean Renoir's *The Woman on the Beach* (1947), Webber is a Coast Guard officer hesitating over marriage and troubled by his past. As played by Pine, he seems perpetually dazed: undecided about meeting blind date Miriam, subsequently unsure whether to marry her, vacillating over telling his commanding officer. Whether the confusion is Webber's own or Pine's over how to play him – as an accidental hero, a maverick breaking the rules or just a guy following orders – it leaves the film oddly directionless at its centre.

Casey Affleck's engineer Ray Sybert is presented as a below-decks maritime MacGyver, improvising new mechanical means to steer half an oil tanker using chains and steel girders, but he inadvertently embodies the film with his remorselessly laconic competence. At times he seems to be engaged in a man-of-fewest-words competition with Graham McTavish's shipmate Frank Fauteux. The only character to break the monotony of this dry desert of manly understatement is Miriam (Holliday Grainger), in particular when she gatecrashes the male preserve of the Coast Guard station to demand that Cluff recall Webber from his apparently hopeless mission. At one point she is brusquely asked if she "knows where she's going" and answers confidently in the affirmative. With her determination to marry, and a backdrop of men risking their lives crossing a treacherous stretch of water, this could be a deliberate reference to Powell and Pressburger's *I Know Where I'm Going!* (1945). But reminding viewers of such a mercurial and inventive film isn't a comparison to flatter *The Finest Hours*. **S**

Grimsby

USA/United Kingdom 2016
Director: Louis Leterrier
Certificate 15 83m 0s

Reviewed by Henry K. Miller

In 1964 Raymond Durgnat wrote, "In 20 years' time we will all be meeting at the NFT [as BFI Southbank was then called] to wax nostalgic over *Carry On Nurse* and saying, 'Ah, the vitality of those old-time comedians – how well they reflected the sex-crazy 60s.'" And he was largely right. By the 1980s, as it turned out, there was cultural capital to be gained from talking up the lowbrow tradition in British comedy as subversive in its vulgarity, Bakhtinian, carnivalesque etc. On the occasion of a full NFT retrospective of *Carry On* comedies in 1999, around the time that Ali G made Sacha Baron Cohen's name, Professor Colin McCabe wrote in the *Guardian* that only "pompous idiots" could doubt the films' merits, which included the operative assumption that "authority is little more than a ridiculous attempt to deny the reality and presence of the body". So in decrying this witless rubbish one takes the risk that posterity will find something of value in it; indeed, as has happened in the past, the full weight of cultural authority may be thrown behind the purportedly anti-authoritarian.

But *Grimsby* really is witless rubbish. Baron Cohen plays Nobby, a fecund and feckless football fan from the titular Lincolnshire fishing port; Mark Strong is his long-lost brother Sebastian, who, having being adopted by a well-off Home Counties family in childhood, has grown up to be an MI6 agent. Nobby interrupts him at a crucial moment during an operation in London, apparently causing the death of the head of the World Health Organization, and the pair then have to go on the run as a result, it being apparently impossible for Sebastian simply to explain what happened to his superiors. After a brief time laying low in Grimsby, the two brothers go after the real villains, a terrorist group called the Maelstrom, first in South Africa, then at the World Cup final in Chile, where Maelstrom chief Rhonda George (Penélope Cruz) intends to spread a deadly, slow-acting virus among the crowd, causing a global pandemic. What promised to be, for better or worse, a domestic comedy about council-estate Britain is for the most part a globetrotting spy film with lots of jokes about anal violation.

Grimsby gets off fairly lightly, with a string of unfunny jokes reminiscent of *Private Eye*'s 'Yobs' cartoon, but in truth the satirical aspect of Baron

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Jim Whitaker
Dorothy Aufiero
Screenplay
Scott Silver
Paul Tamasy
Eric Johnson
Based on the book
by Casey Sherman,
Michael J. Tougas
**Director of
Photography**
Javier Aguirresarobe
Editor
Tatiana S. Riegel
Production Designer
Michael Corenbliith

**Music Composed
& Conducted by**
Carter Burwell
Sound Mixer
Tom Williams
Costume Designer
Louise Frogley
Stunt Co-ordinator
Kevin C. Scott
Visual Effects
MPC
Mr.X Inc.
©Disney
Enterprises, Inc.
**Production
Companies**

A Whitaker
Entertainment/Red
Hawk Entertainment
production
A Craig Gillespie film
Walt Disney Pictures
Executive Producer
Doug Merrifield

Cast
Chris Pine
Bernie Webber
Casey Affleck
Raymond Sybert
Ben Foster
Richard Livesey

Holliday Grainger
Miriam Webber
John Ortiz
Wallace Quirey
Kyle Gallner
Andy Fitzgerald
John Magaro
Ervin Maske
Graham McTavish
Frank Fauteux
**Michael
Raymond-James**
D.A. Brown
Eric Bana
Daniel Cluff
Beau Knapp
Mel Gouthro

Josh Stewart
Tchuda Southerland
Abraham Benrubi
George 'Tiny' Meyers
Keiynan Lonsdale
Eldon Hagan
Rachel Brosnahan
Bea Hansen
Ben Koldyke
Donald Bangs
Matthew Maher
Carl Nickerson

**Dolby Atmos
In Colour
Prints by
Fotokem**

[2.35:1]

**Some screenings
presented in 3D**

Distributor
Buena Vista
International (UK)

Chatham, Massachusetts, 1951. Coast Guard officer Bernie Webber meets telephonist Miriam on a blind date. A year later, Miriam proposes and Webber reluctantly agrees. When a freak storm breaks an oil tanker in half off the coast, Webber's commanding officer Cluff orders him to take a crew out over the treacherous Chatham Bar, which


locals regard as impossible in severe weather. Webber clears the Bar but loses his compass. He reaches the stricken tanker just as it is sinking. Disregarding regulations, he fits all the survivors on board, losing only one, and returns to Chatham, guided by the car headlights of the locals who have lined the waterfront to await his return.



Spies like us: Sacha Baron Cohen, Mark Strong

Hail, Caesar!

USA/United Kingdom/Japan 2016
Directors: Joel Coen, Ethan Coen
Certificate 12A 105m 56s

Cohen's work has always been subordinated to the coarsely bodily. In one sequence Nobby and Sebastian crawl into an elephant's vagina, only to have to deal with a whole queue of horny male elephants: both ingest a large quantity of elephant semen and Nobby's arse is left very much the worse for wear. Later they have to stuff fireworks up their behinds and let them explode to stop the virus getting out: this time both of their arsens are left very much the worse for wear. I'm not sure anyone's authority is gravely endangered by all this, but perhaps critics 20 years hence will take another view. 

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Sacha Baron Cohen
Nira Park
Peter Baynham
Ant Hines
Todd Schulman
Screenplay
Sacha Baron Cohen
Phil Johnston
Peter Baynham

Story
Sacha Baron Cohen
Phil Johnston

Director of

Photography

Oliver Wood

Editors

James Thomas

Jonathan Amos

Debra Neil-Fisher

Evan Henke

Production

Designer

Kave Quinn

Music

Erran Baron Cohen

David Buckley

Production Mixers

UK Unit:

Colin Nicolson

South Africa Unit:

Nico Louw

Costume Designer

Paco Delgado

Stunt Co-

ordinators

Adam Kirley

Grant Hulley

©Columbia Pictures

Industries, Inc.

and LSC Film
Corporation and
Village Roadshow
Films Global Inc.

Production

Companies

Columbia Pictures

presents in

association with

LStar Capital, Village

Roadshow Pictures

a Four by Two

Films production

A Big Talk Pictures

/Working Title

production

A film by Louis

Leterrier

Executive

Producers

Louise Rosner Meyer

Phil Johnston

James Biddle

Eric Fellner

Tim Bevan

Adam McKay

Bruce Berman

Greg Basser

Ben Waisbren

Film Extracts

South Park

Bigger Longer &

Uncut (1999)

Cast

Sacha Baron Cohen

Norman Grimsby,

'Nobby'

Mark Strong

Sebastian Grimsby

Isla Fisher
Jodie Figgis
Rebel Wilson
Dawn Grobham

Gabourey Sidibe

Banu the cleaner

Penélope Cruz

Rhonda George

Barkhad Abdi

Tabansi Nyagura

Scott Adkins

Pavel Lukashenko

John Bradley

Derrick Fellner

David Harewood

Black Gareth

Tamsin Egerton

Carla Barnes

Sam Hazeldine

Jeremy Chilcott

John Thomson

Bob Tolliver

Ricky Tomlinson

Paedo Pete

Johnny Vegas

Milky Pimms

Annabelle Wallis

Lina Smit

Dolby Digital

In Colour

[2.35:1]

Distributor

Sony Pictures

Releasing UK

US theatrical title

The Brothers

Grimsby



To hell and backstage: Josh Brolin, Heather Goldenhersh

See Feature
on page 32

Reviewed by J.M. Tyree and Ben Walters

Early in *Hail, Caesar!*, Eddie Mannix (Josh Brolin), a production executive for Capitol Pictures, rescues a

budding starlet from a photographer who has her posing for 'French postcard' pictures in a bungalow-cum-porn-set reminiscent of the one in *The Big Sleep* (1946). Waiting in his car in the rain, Mannix looks like a Bogart-type hero; in fact, he's less concerned about the dame in distress than about damage control for Capitol. The replacement of the upright detective with an industry fixer is emblematic not only of the studios' real-life obsession with controlling their employees' private lives but also of what Joel and Ethan Coen are up to in *Hail, Caesar!* The film's mission might be to save the movies from themselves – to celebrate the classical system's capacity to generate delight without overlooking the ugliness and absurdity involved in the process.


Mannix takes his name from a real MGM fixer now associated with as many horrors as favours. The Coens' Mannix, however, is a fundamentally decent if righteously slap-happy guy, and the story's straight man. Over 27 fraught hours, he wrangles an aw-shucks cowboy star (Alden Ehrenreich) and the prissy director of drawing-room dramas (Ralph Fiennes) on whom he's been foisted; deals with the pregnancy of a sass-talking bathing beauty (Scarlett Johansson); negotiates with duelling gossip columnists Thora and Thessaly Thacker (Tilda Swinton, twice); and grapples with a bizarre communist plot to kidnap and indoctrinate a dopey matinee idol (George Clooney), currently playing a centurion at the time of Christ. A gaggle of subversive screenwriters and a tap-dancing ace (Channing Tatum) are also involved. Meanwhile Mannix is being headhunted by Lockheed, the defence giant.

All this takes place against an exquisitely manic backdrop of detailed pastiche. The Coens' love of classical Hollywood has always been clear in their genre-hopping career path but here they run the gamut within a single movie, taking in Technicolor epic, aquatic spectacular, knockabout western, shore-leave musical and more, all with jauntily askew titles such as *Lazy O' Moon*,

Merrily We Dance and indeed *Hail, Caesar!* But one needn't know Hollywood lore inside out to enjoy the gags or the bravura set pieces, which range from theological and dialectical roundtables to high-diving and spaghetti lassos. Unlike the Coens' last picture, *Inside Llewyn Davis* (2013), or their previous pass at the classical studio system, *Barton Fink* (1991), the tone here is predominantly warm-hearted, offering perhaps their most gentle ribbings since *Raising Arizona* (1987).

Preston Sturges's teasing Tinseltown meditation *Sullivan's Travels* (1941) looms large – as it did in the Coens' *O Brother, Where Art Thou?* (2000), which aped Sullivan's Depression-era setting and embraced the lesson, learnt by its film-director hero, that laughter is "all some people have". Like *Sullivan's Travels* and *O Brother, Hail, Caesar!* uses a scene of an audience in stitches to illustrate the capacity of moviegoing to generate respite and fellow feeling. In this case, however, the audience is made up not of prison inmates or a church congregation but the tuxedo-clad "swells of dreamland". Ever sceptical, the Coens disavow any clear-cut rapprochement between artists and 'the common man' (Barton Fink's target audience), even as their affection for the form is writ large.

Where *Barton Fink* – set at the same fictional studio a decade earlier – was populated almost exclusively by shysters and maniacs, *Hail, Caesar!* is short on outright charlatans. Although there's plenty of narrative skulduggery, characters tend to act in the service of conscientiously held belief systems, from communism to Catholicism to the good of the studio. In the battle between Capitol Pictures and *Das Kapital*, the Coens make both sides look ridiculous but mostly harmless, as Billy Wilder did in his Cold War Coca-Cola send-up *One, Two, Three* (1961). In a sense, *Hail, Caesar!* is a film about belief: gotta serve somebody, as its title implies, and we meet many servants of many masters.

As for the Coens themselves, eccentric and critical Hollywood tomb raiders they might be but, like Sturges, they believe sincerely in the value of delight for its own sake. Unlike *True Grit* (2010) or *Inside Llewyn Davis*, this picture isn't dramatically driven; it attends to plot and character but it really revels in the pleasures of technical virtuosity. The riding, dancing, acting, design, 

Grimsby, Lincolnshire, the present. Nobby, an uncouth father of many children, learns the location of his long-lost younger brother Sebastian after 28 years apart. Unknown to Nobby, Sebastian is a secret agent for a black-ops unit of MI6. Nobby interrupts him in the middle of an operation in London, causing the assassination of the head of the World Health Organization by a terrorist group called the Maelstrom. Sebastian's handlers mistakenly blame him for the murder, and move to kill him. With great reluctance he goes into hiding in Grimsby with Nobby.

The cause of their estrangement is revealed in periodic flashbacks: after the death of their parents, Sebastian was adopted by a well-off family from the south of England, while Nobby remained in Lincolnshire and was raised in state institutions.

Sebastian's only remaining friend inside MI6 identifies the real assassin and finds out that he has gone to South Africa. Nobby and Sebastian follow; when Sebastian is incapacitated by heroin, Nobby has to perform his brother's duties as a secret agent and seduce an arms dealer's wife. She tells them that the Maelstrom intends to release a virus at the World Cup final in Chile, and so they proceed to Santiago. With the help of Nobby's friends, the brothers defeat the Maelstrom and prevent the start of a pandemic.

choreography and editing skills put to the service of Capitol Pictures are breathtaking. *Hail, Caesar!* itself, meanwhile, confirms the range of the Coens and their stock company, including costumier Mary Zophres, production designer Jess Gonchor, cinematographer Roger Deakins and musician Carter Burwell.

The man from Lockheed brags about nuking Bikini Atoll, disdains Hollywood as a "circus" and derides Mannix's job of "babysitting kooks". But the Coens are all for the circus and the kooks. Like Mannix, they recognise the 'genius of the system', that inexplicable mixture of art and commerce that makes for movie magic. In *Hail, Caesar!*, they express this ethos through a kind of late style that privileges craft and tolerates chaos. Neither high modernist experimental debunkers nor conventional followers of the rules of mass production, the Coens, like the classical directors they have emulated, always remain 'in but not of' the confines of Hollywood's circumscribed dreamland. Here, they serve it like true – if gimlet-eyed – believers. **B**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by Joel Coen Ethan Coen Tim Bevan Eric Fellner Written by Joel Coen Ethan Coen Director of Photography Roger Deakins Edited by Roderick Jaynes [i.e. Joel Coen, Ethan Coen] Production Designer Jess Gonchor Music Carter Burwell Supervising Sound Editor Skip Lievsay Costume Designer Mary Zophres	association with Dentsu Inc./Fuji Television Network, Inc. Mike Zoss Productions Executive Producer Robert Graf Cast Josh Brolin Eddie Mannix George Clooney Baird Whitlock Alden Ehrenreich Hobie Doyle Ralph Fiennes Laurence Laurentz Jonah Hill Joseph Silverman, 'Joe' Scarlett Johansson DeeAnna Moran Frances McDormand C.C. Calhoun Tilda Swinton Thora Thacker/ Thessaly Thacker Channing Tatum Burt Gurney Max Baker	head Communist writer Heather Goldenhersh Natalie, secretary Christopher Lambert Arne Sesslum Ciancy Brown Gracchus Ian Blackman Cuddahy Fred Melamed Communist writer John Bluthal Professor Marcuse Robert Trebor producer of <i>Hail, Caesar!</i> Geoffrey Cantor Sid Siegelstein Michael Gambon narrated by Dolby Digital In Colour [L.R.5.1] Distributor Universal Pictures International UK & Eire
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Hollywood, early 1950s. Over 27 hours, Capitol Pictures production executive Eddie Mannix keeps the studio machinery turning while entertaining a job offer from the Lockheed Corporation and tending to his family and his Catholic conscience.

Rodeo actor Hobie Doyle is cast in a drawing-room comedy, provoking friction with director Laurence Laurentz. While playing a Roman centurion who beholds Christ, matinee idol Baird Whitlock is kidnapped by disaffected communist screenwriters based in Malibu. Rival journalists and sisters Thora and Thessaly Thacker hunt for stories. Mannix searches for a fiancé for pregnant, unmarried star DeeAnna Moran. Mannix arranges to pay a \$100,000 ransom for Whitlock, now a communist convert. While on a date with actress Carlotta Valdez, Doyle realises that musical star Burt Gurney is the communist ringleader; he follows him to Malibu. Gurney defects to the Soviets but loses the ransom money. Doyle returns Whitlock to the studio, where Mannix makes him fall in line. Moran marries studio fixer Joseph Silverman for love. Mannix declines Lockheed's offer.

The Here After

Poland/Sweden/France 2015
Director: Magnus von Horn
Certificate 15 101m 55s

Reviewed by Trevor Johnston

It's certainly a risky narrative strategy, deliberately withholding information in a bid to forestall the viewers' moral judgement. When Swedish teenager John is released from a detention centre in the opening scene of *The Here After*, we know he was in there for a reason, but Swedish-born, Lodz-trained writer-director Magnus von Horn takes his time revealing exactly what lurks in his protagonist's past. It is not until John is attacked in a supermarket by an aggressively embittered mother that we are given an indication of the grave personal legacy that will continue to inform John's actions and his tense, increasingly combative relationship with family, former friends and the school to which he bravely decides to return. Since it takes a full hour before we hear John's own reflections on the full nature of his misdeeds, an understandable reaction in the meantime would be to decide that he's simply too toxic to warrant our sympathy. Von Horn's film is shaped with great confidence, however, and rather than its evident evasions pushing us away, the void of uncertainty at the centre of the story is circumscribed in such a manner as to draw us in.

The striking central performance from Ulrik Munther, a major pop star in Sweden, plays a big part in that. His sculpted looks are virtually angelic, yet he's scrupulously inscrutable throughout. Fascinated, we wait for some fleeting look or gesture to signal what's really behind the beautiful facade. What does become clearer is that the character is not actively guarding his feelings, he's just not mature enough to control them or indeed grasp how they impact on those around him. Munther's physiognomy, older than boyhood yet not quite settled into adult fixity, adds to the tantalising intrigue, set in an effective context by von Horn's myriad directorial choices.

Credits and Synopsis

Producers Mariusz Włodarski Madeleine Ekman Screenplay Magnus von Horn Script Sparring Partner Andrzej Mellin Director of Photography Lukasz Zal Editor Agnieszka Głinska Production Designer Jagna Dobesz Henrik Ryhlander Sound Michał Robaczewski Costumes Anna-Karin Cameron	©Lava Films, Zentropa International Sweden, Cinéma Defacto Production Companies Lava Films & Zentropa International Sweden present in co-production with Cinéma Defacto, Film i Väst, Opus Film Funded with the support of Svenska Film Institutet, Polski Instytut Sztuki Filmowej, Centre National du Cinéma et de l'Image Animée, Ministère des Affaires Étrangères,	Institut Français, Eurimages, SVT A film by Magnus von Horn Developed with the support of Conseil Général de l'Essonne, Passion to Market with the support of the European Community Media Programme and the Polish Film Institute, EAVE Programme – a training initiative of the MEDIA Programme of the European Union, EKRA 2011 – supported by MEDIA
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Sweden, present day. Teenager John is released from a youth detention centre and taken home by his father to join younger brother Filip at the family farm. The trio share an unspoken knowledge of the events that put John in custody, and the details become clearer when he's attacked by a still-grieving mother in a supermarket, and subsequently sneaks into the bedroom of the ex-girlfriend he murdered. He is spotted by neighbour Malin, a student at the high school to which John now returns, meeting resentment from his classmates and violent threats from Kim – his former friend, whose romantic involvement with the victim may have sparked John's actions. As John and Malin form a romantic attachment,



Debt to society: Ulrik Munther

Compositions consistently show us characters trapped in frames within the frame, while frequent wide-open landscape shots put everything within the broad vista of an implacable universe. As John's disciplinarian father battles to assert his authority over his sons, the camera trains on the back of his head, to intently oppressive effect, and all the while the Scandinavian winter light – crisp and bright yet without a hint of warmth – proves cumulatively, insidiously unsettling.

Sure, von Horn has been studying his Haneke, but he's a good learner, and his film absolutely puts us where he wants us, gradually realising the tragic implications of John's childlike belief that he can put his past behind him and everyone else will somehow wipe the slate clean. That's a very humane take on his particular plight, and the film is both keenly provocative and ultimately moving. Still, while its assured craft can hardly fail to impress, in retrospect its expressive humanity is achieved by keeping the reality of the victim's suffering largely out of the frame. The result is potent, certainly, but naggingly troubling in the longer term. **B**

Training Programme With the participation of L'Aide aux Cinémas du Monde, Centre National du Cinéma et de l'Image Animée, Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, Institut Français, Eurimages In co-operation with SVT Produced by Lava Films, Zentropa International Sweden Cast Ulrik Munther John Mats Blomgren	Martin Alexander Nordgren Filip Wiesław Komasa grandfather Loa Ek Malin Ellen Jelinek Bea Oliver Heilmann Kim Felix Göransson Hampus Inger Nilsson Principal Sven Ahlström Kim's dad Dolby Digital In Colour	[2.35:1] Subtitles Distributor Soda Pictures Polish theatrical title Intruz Swedish theatrical title/on-screen title Efterskalv
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he confesses that he virtually sleepwalked into killing the girl. John bristles at his father's disciplinarian attitude. Kim and his cronies throw bricks through the farm windows, prompting John to give chase. A violent confrontation sees Kim and another boy give John a severe beating. The headteacher makes Kim offer a reluctant apology, but also insists that John leave the school after hundreds of students sign a petition against him. When Malin admits that she too is frightened of John, he collects a hunting rifle from his elderly, infirm grandfather and visits the dead girl's mother, begging her to shoot him. She refuses, yet shows some sympathy for the pain he is evidently going through.

Homme Less

Austria/USA 2014
Director: Thomas Wirthensohn

Reviewed by Thirza Wakefield

Peeved when two girls pass by him without acknowledging his solicitation to photograph them for the street-style section of a fashion magazine, Mark Reay delivers his assessment of their dismissal direct to camera: they have an “overdeveloped sense of importance”. Possibly; or, perhaps, like a lot of women, these girls are leery of strange men calling out to them unbidden. As it turns out – and it’s a nasty surprise, for which the film’s fatuous title prepares us not at all – the vulnerability of these women is nothing compared to Mark’s.

For the past five years, former model Mark, subject of Thomas Wirthensohn’s first feature, has slept rough on the rooftop of a friend’s New York apartment building, unbeknown to this friend and to anyone else who makes Mark’s acquaintance. He keeps his effects in lockers across town; among them is a portfolio of photographs that attests to his past successes, and just enough articles of designer clothing to stay his unmasking for another day. Mark, who takes good care of himself, scrapes a living by selling his photographs to fashion magazines and through film-extra work and street performance.

However, Mark’s material circumstances, his spending night after night under tarpaulin, don’t make him half so vulnerable as does Wirthensohn’s misuse of his documentarist’s access to a person who, after waiting so long for a friend with whom he can be completely honest, divulges his innermost secrets from dusk until dawn. If Mark’s readiness to make a confidant of Wirthensohn makes him an irresistible object of study, it also makes him painfully susceptible to abuses of his privacy.

Wirthensohn’s film is not what it purports to be. In no way is it about the “underbelly of the American Dream”, as the film’s promotional website claims, nor remotely “the struggle of the vanishing middle class”. Wirthensohn makes no attempt to contextualise Mark’s privation, to impute it to some larger social or economic phenomenon. Instead, his camera clings to Mark like shrink-wrap. This is portraiture so claustrophobic it leaves one short of breath. Because Mark is not, as the film would have us believe, an eccentric. Rather, he is suffering from a host of untreated mental-health disorders.

In addition to its desertion of the duty of care it owes Mark, what is enraging about this film is its specious commitment to depicting him as a walking contradiction: a homeless person working undetected in the fashion industry; a man who passes for ‘normal’ but is really a vagrant. There are many things that are fascinating about Mark; this supposed perversion is the least of them. And it’s a false contradiction. Troublingly, Mark’s body language gives him away. As effectual as he can be – he has both bank account and health insurance – Mark’s mask isn’t wholly convincing. It isn’t enough that he has shaved or wears an ironed shirt; dejection and a sense of defectiveness are written all over his bearing. And Mark knows this; it is why he can always be trusted to seek affirmation of his ‘nice’ appearance.

There are other inconsistencies to Mark’s existence that have nothing to do with deceptive



Misunderstood: Mark Reay

exterior; they are not brought to light by Wirthensohn’s direction but surface of their own volition. Here is a man getting by on the most meagre of means, who still cannot switch off an appreciation for fine things dinned into him over a formative period of eight prosperous years as a young model. Stepping out of the elevator into the reception area of Marc Jacobs’s office, he surveys the place and pronounces it, “Not bad.”

Mark’s emotional turmoil will resonate with audiences far more than this film dares to recognise. Strip away the unskilled camerawork, the poor-quality sound (necessitating occasional subtitling) and the levity of the lounge-jazz score, and there is a film about what happens to a person who lives a lie; when stealth, fear of discovery, anxiety and criminalisation are the real rear curtain of one’s day-to-day existence. The grave mishandling of the amassed footage and of Mark are quite unforgivable, not to mention distressing. 📞

Credits and Synopsis

Producers

Wolfgang Rammil
Karol Martesko-
Fenster
Thomas
Wirthensohn

Filmed by

Thomas
Wirthensohn

Edited by

Josh Cramer
Thomas
Wirthensohn

Music

Composed by
Kyle Eastwood

Matt McGuire

Sound Mix
Clemens Kloss
Matthias Erment

©Filmhaus Films,
Schatzi Productions

Production

Filmhaus Vienna
presents a Filmhaus
Films and Schatzi
Productions

production in
association with
Thought Engine

A film by Thomas
Wirthensohn
With support from
Österreichisches
Filminstitut,
Vorarlberg
Unser Land

In Colour
[1.78:1]
Part-subtitled

Distributor
DocHouse

A documentary about homeless former model Mark Reay, who makes a small living from fashion photography and keeps his sleeping rough concealed from even his closest friends. The camera follows Mark – who narrates his story extempore – as he goes about his everyday business in New York. Mark divulges the routines of his sleeping arrangements, and permits access to more exceptional occurrences such as his picking up a woman at a street carnival and appearing as an extra in ‘Men in Black 3’.

The Host

United Kingdom 2015
Director: Miranda Pennell
Certificate U 60m 0s

Reviewed by Sukhdev Sandhu

Miranda Pennell’s 2010 short *Why Colonel Bunny Was Killed* was a fascinating example of colonial forensics, which used a forgotten 1908 memoir entitled ‘Among the Wild Tribes of the Afghan Frontier’ as the starting point for a suggestive and never dogmatic exploration of Englishness, subaltern history and the relationship between empire and photography. Pennell’s *The Host* continues in this vein, being at once a fragmentary narrative about malformed modernity, an enigmatic fusion of the personal and the petro-political, and a series of inconvenient truths about the long history of Anglo-American interventions in Iran.

What a chastening – and tersely synthesised – history it is: the Anglo-Persian Oil Company, founded in 1909, bought the rights to half a million square miles of Iranian territory, before the British government purchased a majority stake in 1914. The name changed to Anglo-Iranian oil in 1935. In 1951, secular democrat Mohammad Mossadeq was elected prime minister with a mandate to nationalise the country’s oil industry; just two years later he was ousted after an Anglo-American coup that installed the pro-western Shah in his place. By 1979, British Petroleum (the name AIOC had assumed in 1954) finally ceased trading in Iran. Covert operations, sham democracy, economic self-interest masquerading as benevolence: any connections with international geopolitics today don’t need to be spelled out.

The journey Pennell undertakes is altogether more personal and tentative. Curious to learn more about her own parents’ involvement with BP, she comes across a tantalising memoir by a young geologist, rifles through her father’s Polaroid-cramped photograph albums and meditates on strange, fitfully contextualised documents and images in the BP archive. At first it seems as if she’s some kind of truth-seeker, eager to cut through thickets of corporate opacity in order to experience vital revelations about herself and her family; over time, though, she seems most drawn to a feeling of lostness, and of Anglo-Iranian history as a thicket or maze.

Pennell scripted and narrates the film, and there are moments – fortunately infrequent – when her self-reflexivity echoes that of an anthropological fieldworker. Mulling over her interactions with Joy, the nonagenarian widow of a BP employee, she recounts the old woman claiming that the past coexists with the present and future: “I tell her that’s interesting because sometimes looking at all these pictures feels like that.” On another occasion, she responds to a relatively scarce image of Iranian oil workers in close-up: “They look straight through the lens at me. I want them to get back into their box, but they are holding me against my will.”

The Host is at its most insinuating when it drifts away from journalism or deconstruction of the colonial gaze and gravitates towards more speculative terrain, such as rogue archaeology, earth mysteries, visionary landscapes. The aerial photographs BP used to pinpoint oil locations are eerily beautiful: refineries that look like circuit boards, diagrams that read like hieroglyphs, an Iran that looks potentially ‘other’. It’s here,

and when she mentions that the author of a seemingly Orientalist volume entitled *Eastern Odyssey* went on to write bizarre books about how extraterrestrials named the Shining Ones were responsible for the development of Homo sapiens, that Pennell seems on the brink of establishing a droll Anglo-futurist aesthetics.

There are other moments when the muted, elliptical mood of the film is punctuated. Pennell dwells on an archival – and life-size – drawing of a centipede found in the author's bathroom. Reflecting on the time she spent in the BP archives, she includes a photograph of a plastic-wrapped sandwich that evokes a pyramid, and one of a paper napkin sporting a coffee-mug imprint that looks as if a spaceship landed on it. The sound design is consistently inviting and intriguing, shifting subtly between late-70s revolutionary chants, Kathleen Ferrier 78rpm and field recordings that suggest subsidence and disappearance.

Undoubtedly some viewers will want a stronger narrative and a tighter resolution than *The Host* is interested in or capable of providing. In some ways it's a crime movie, but one in which the corpse remains undiscovered and the criminal is not as obvious as might be imagined. Like the Iranian oil workers who haunt Pennell, this is a film that refuses to get back in its box. **S**



Inconvenient truths: *The Host*

Credits and Synopsis

Devised/Written by
Miranda Pennell
Edited by
John Smith
Sound Edit
Miranda Pennell
John Smith

©Miranda Pennell
Production Companies

A film by Miranda Pennell
Supported using public funding by Arts Council England
Arts & Humanities Research Council

Spoken by
Miranda Pennell

In Colour and Black & White
[1.78:1]

Distributor
Independent Cinema Office

British filmmaker Miranda Pennell is inspired to investigate her family's past, particularly her parents' involvement with the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company, now known as BP. She embarks on a series of researches, both personal and political, into Anglo-Iranian oil history since the 1930s.

How to Be Single

USA 2016

Director: Christian Ditter

Certificate 15 109m 39s

Reviewed by Kate Stables

So low have the fortunes of the romantic comedy fallen that they're now breeding them from self-help books. This fluffy, bittily multi-stranded ensemble comedy is very freely adapted indeed from Liz Tuccillo's novel-with-advice of the same name. Aware that 2010's *Eat Pray Love* cornered the market in overseas self-discovery, it resets the novel's globetrotting search for relationship enlightenment in the New York dating jungle. The tropes of TV's *Sex and the City* (Tuccillo wrote for the show) pop up like crabgrass: a chirpy voiceover, a variety of love dilemmas, glossy Manhattan settings and get-wise advice dispensed by tough gals (here it's party girl Rebel Wilson's 'Drink Number' theory, about the combined figure that will turn any pairing erotic). The film also bears a strong family resemblance to *He's Just Not That into You* (2009), the multi-relationship comedy adapted from Tuccillo's previous self-help book, co-authored with Greg Behrendt – and, predictably, it covers much of the same ground.

Dakota Johnson's Alice, a sweetly klutzy new girl in town, is coached in the realities of hooking up by Wilson's abrasive Robin (chiefly mooching drinks off men, treating hangovers with paediatric rehydration fluid and playing hard to get by text). In an attempt at ensemble comedy, Alice's trio of on-off relationships (old flame, footloose Lothario, gun-shy widower) are interspersed with etiolated story strands about her sister's single-mum odyssey and other people's near-miss romances. Hopelessly uneven in its construction, however, the film can't get any of them, big or small, to convince. Lovers are delivered and despatched in scene slivers by a narrative that's more interested in sidekick Robin's flamboyant nightclub flailings and pensées about pubic waxing ("It's like Gandalf is staring at me") than in building relationships. Obsessed with being topical (girls hook up freely, online dater Lucy builds an Excel spreadsheet of possible men), it takes place nonetheless in a Tinder-free world of man-catching manoeuvres and meet-cutes that are as old as *How to Marry a Millionaire*.

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
John Rickard
Dana Fox
Screenplay
Abby Kohn
Marc Silverstein
Dana Fox
Screen Story
Abby Kohn
Marc Silverstein
Based on the book by Liz Tuccillo
Director of Photography
Christian Rein
Edited by

Tia Nolan
Production Designer
Steve Saklad
Music
Fil Eisler
Sound Mixer
Danny Michael
Costume Designer
Leah Katznelson

©Warner Bros. Entertainment Inc., Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Pictures Inc. and RatPac-Dune Entertainment LLC

Production Companies
New Line Cinema and Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Pictures present in association with Flower Films a Wrigley Pictures production in association with RatPac-Dune Entertainment
Executive Producers
Marcus Viscidi
Richard Brener
Michael Disco

Dave Neustadter
Michele Weiss
Drew Barrymore
Nancy Juvonen
Steven Mnuchin

Cast
Dakota Johnson
Alice
Rebel Wilson
Robin
Damon Wayans Jr
David
Anders Holm
Tom

Alison Brie
Lucy
Nicholas Braun
Josh
Jake Lacy
Ken
Jason Mantzoukas
George
Leslie Mann
Meg
Colin Jost
Paul
Sarah Ramos
Michelle
Dolby Digital

In Colour

Distributor
Warner Bros. Pictures
International (UK)



Glass warfare: Rebel Wilson, Dakota Johnson

While Johnson is fresh and likeable as the heroine seeking new experiences, the characterisations are uniformly one-note (crazed online dater, cynical bar owner and so on). Alison Brie (much funnier in the raunchy romance *Sleeping with Other People*) is notably wasted as the desperate Lucy, her story consigned to a handful of scenes. To compensate for its scanty narrative, the film gorges without irony on New York locations (it's horribly reminiscent of the 'New York is almost a character in our love story' shtick in the 2014 romcom spoof *They Came Together*). Accordingly, the film's unabashed property-porn of vast SoHo loft apartments, Upper West Side havens and cute Brooklyn studios is what will entrance its twentysomething audience, rather than its laboured home truths about romance.

Far more a jaundiced guide to big-city dating than a journey of self-actualisation, the film makes a late scramble to justify its title, bouncing Alice into forswearing men. The prospect of life without them is so unedifying, however, that it reduces her to a rapid montage of lone-lady clichés (including building a magnetic dress-unzipper). Even Alice's long-planned visit to see the Grand Canyon sunset must be validated by a teasing over-the-shoulder look back towards a possible swain. It's fine to be single, apparently, but God forbid you should actually be alone. **S**

boyfriend Ken, breaking up with him when he discovers it. At Alice's birthday party, Tom finally tells Lucy that he loves her – but she is happily marrying bookstore owner George. Robin accuses Alice of subordinating herself to boyfriends, and they are estranged. Josh tries to sleep with Alice for 'closure'. Meg goes into labour at a party, and nearly has her daughter in a cab. She is reconciled with Ken, who wants to make a family with her. Alice renounces dating and prepares for a hiking trip in the Grand Canyon. David talks to his daughter about her mother. Alice admires the Grand Canyon alone.

Iona

United Kingdom/Germany 2015
Director: Scott Graham
Certificate 15 85m 20s

Reviewed by Philip Kemp

When *Iona* premiered last year at the Edinburgh Film Festival, it ran 110 minutes. In its present incarnation, it's 85 minutes long. To judge by EIFF reviews, it originally began with a scene showing the act of violence that we now glimpse only in three brief flashbacks. This curtailing wasn't imposed on the filmmakers, but was decided on by the film's writer/director Scott Graham after the Edinburgh screenings.

Not having seen the longer version I can't be certain, but I suspect this drastic cutting may not have been entirely beneficial. As it stands, almost the first thing we see is Iona (Ruth Negga) and her teenage son Billy (Ben Gallagher) burning their car en route to the island she's named after. We're given no clue why they're doing this; only gradually do we gather that it's somehow linked to the act of violence shown in subsequent flashbacks. So we have that to puzzle over, while trying to disentangle the fraught backstory that ties Iona to the island community where she grew up: a complex web of guilt, resentment and semi-incestuous relationships. And since this latter nexus seems to be the film's chief concern, having the other matter to worry about just gets in the way.

Iona recaps several of the elements of Graham's 2012 first feature *Shell*: the stark remote Scottish landscape, the buried familial discontents, the loveless first sexual experience, the intimations of incest. Both films move slowly, building gradually to a moment of self-destructive violence. And in both the most striking performance is given by a young actress making her feature debut: Chloe Pirrie in *Shell*, Sorch Groundsell in the present film.

Iona adds religion to the mix. The community Iona is returning to, where she was brought up, is close-knit and intensely religious, Calvinist in its austerity. But Iona has lost her faith; she berates Billy when he talks of praying. However, the barely suppressed hostility she



Ruth Negga, Douglas Henshall, Ben Gallacher

encounters from Elisabeth, daughter of her own foster-father Daniel, stems less from this than from something more personal: the sexual relationship between Iona and Daniel, resumed soon after she returns to the island.

If Iona has lost her faith, her son hasn't. Billy begs his mother to pray for Daniel, who is stricken by a fatal seizure; believing that he killed his own father (Iona's policeman ex-boyfriend), he uses Elisabeth's husband Matthew as his confessor. His relationship with the couple's disabled teenage daughter Sarah (Groundsell, luminous) seems to hint at some possibility of redemption; yet when they have sex he's brutal, evidently believing that's how it should be done. If there is redemption, it's Sarah to whom it comes, in the form of a miracle that nods towards Dennis Potter's *Brimstone & Treacle*.

Iona makes potent use of the rocky, treeless island landscape, visual correlative of the community's austere religion, and builds up a powerful sense of foreboding. But altogether it feels like a collage of fascinating fragments that never quite knit together. For all its emotional tension and telling moments, it comes across as pieces of a drama tantalisingly just out of alignment. The longer version may not have been better, but it might well have been more coherent. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Producer
Margaret Matheson
Written by
Scott Graham
Director of Photography
Yoliswa von Dallwitz
Editor
Florian Nonnenmacher
Production Designer
Stephen Mason
Sound Recordist
Chris Campion
Costume Designer
Jo Thompson

with Arte
Supported by the
National Lottery
through Creative
Scotland
Made with the
support of the
BFI's Film Fund
Executive Producers
Christopher Collins
Lizzie Francke
Ian Davies
Rebecca Long

Jim Sturgeon
Stephen

In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
Verve Pictures

Cast

Ruth Negga
Iona
Douglas Henshall
Daniel
Tom Brooke
Matthew
Michelle Duncan
Elisabeth
Ben Gallacher
Billy, 'Bull'
Sorch Groundsell
Sarah
Christine Steele
young reader
Matthew Zajac
Detective

©Boudica Iona Ltd, The British Film Institute
Production Companies
BFI and Creative Scotland present a Bard Entertainments production
In association with Boudica Silver
Co-produced with Hanfarn & Ufer and ZDF
In co-operation

Present-day Scotland. Iona, a woman in her thirties, and her 15-year-old son Billy take a ferry to the island she's named after. En route they burn their car and continue on foot; on the island they arrive at the house of Iona's foster-father Daniel. Their arrival takes him aback; she's been away for 15 years. At church she and Billy meet the rest of the community, who offer her a guarded welcome. Daniel's daughter Elisabeth, who now lives with her husband Matthew and daughter Sarah in what was Iona's mother's house, seems particularly uneasy at Iona's return.

At a ceilidh, Iona dances animatedly with several of the men until Elisabeth interrupts her. Sarah, who's lost the use of her legs and is carried everywhere on Matthew's back, shows an interest in Billy. While Billy is stonewall-building with Matthew, Iona and Daniel renew their sexual relationship. Later, Daniel is struck by a seizure and dies. Billy confesses to Matthew that he killed the man he believes was his father, a Glasgow policeman who was Iona's boyfriend. Elisabeth asks Iona if Billy knows that Daniel was his father. Billy carries Sarah to a barn, where they have sex before he runs off. Sarah discovers that she has regained the use of her legs. The police, summoned by Matthew, arrive on the island seeking Billy for the killing; fleeing, he jumps off a cliff. Iona, howling, cradles his body.

Kung Fu Panda 3

USA/China 2016
Directors: Jennifer Yuh, Nelson Alessandro Carloni
Certificate PG 94m 47s

Reviewed by Andrew Osmond

In today's cinema of serialised fantasy epics, even *Kung Fu Panda* (2008) has grown to Joseph Campbell proportions. In *Kung Fu Panda 2* (2011), the bear hero Po learnt of the destruction of his birthplace and species, but a sting ending revealed that his father was still alive in a secret panda valley. From that, most viewers could accurately predict the course of this third film, which centres on Po's reunion with his long-lost father Li, voiced by Bryan Cranston, playing a far jollier patriarch than he did in TV's *Breaking Bad*.

Scenes of boisterous bonding ensue, along with more poignant moments (Po's mother, who rescued him, *didn't* survive.) There are also Li's inevitable clashes with Po's adoptive father, who, as any fan of the films can tell you, is Mr Ping, an ever-fussing goose voiced by James Hong. Equally inevitably, Po journeys to Li's valley home deep in icy mountains, like Shangri-La from *Lost Horizon* (1937). "If I lived here, I wouldn't tell anyone either," snorts Mr Ping before the mist lifts. Of course, the valley is threatened by the film's new villain – a yak escaped from the spirit world. He's voiced by J.K. Simmons, though he's not a patch on Gary Oldman's resplendently psycho peacock in film two.

Kung Fu Panda 3 is an impressively polished franchise product, whose spectacular visuals and hit-and-miss jokes mostly distract from the thin story and lengthy repetition of the morals we've heard before. None of the spiritual 'find your real you' lessons, delivered by Dustin Hoffman's red panda and Randall Duk Kim's Yoda tortoise, match the pithy climactic exchange in the original *Panda*. Then the gasping villain protested, "You're just a big fat panda!" Po: "I'm not a big fat panda, I'm the big fat panda!"

The first film was among the most beautiful CG cartoons when it opened; eight years on, it's hard not to take the franchise's spectacle for granted. It continues to play with stylised colours and images outside the norms for Hollywood animation, with some sequences harking back to both Chinese paintings and drawn animation (it's worth staying to the end credits, when many of the film's scenes are beautifully reproduced in traditional-looking form). There are witty, dynamic split screens, while the flying battles in the spirit realm feel like beautified versions of the fantasy fights in *Dragon Ball Z* and similar anime series. Ironically, Teng Huatao, who directed the Chinese version of *Panda* (see below), stressed that he tried to remove anything that looked not Chinese but Japanese. **S**



Happy valley: Kung Fu Panda 3

← The American version is co-directed by the Korean-American Jennifer Yuh Nelson (who also co-directed the second *Panda*) and the Italian animator Alessandro Carloni. Yuh's continued prominence on one of animation's most lucrative franchises is heartening in a field that still seems an all-boys holdout, especially after Pixar's girl-power film *Brave* (2012) replaced director Brenda Chapman during production. *Kung Fu Panda 3* may also earn progressive stars for presenting Po as a hero with two loving fathers – and the bachelor goose Mr Ping is at least as plausibly gay as the oft-queered Elsa from Disney's *Frozen* (2013).

Commercially, though, the film's lasting significance may be as an American-Chinese co-production. Reportedly, a third of *Kung Fu Panda 3*'s production work was done at the Oriental DreamWorks studio in Shanghai, which employed more than 200 people on the film. This gives *Panda* a preferential status in the Chinese market, where the second *Panda* was the highest-earning cartoon film ever. As mentioned above, there will be a distinct Chinese version of *Panda 3* with modified animation. Hollywood already localises animated films in Asia – the Japanese *Inside Out* (2015) had the girl hating bell peppers rather than broccoli – but if successful, *Kung Fu Panda 3* could set a gamechanging industry precedent. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by Melissa Cobb	Animation LLC Production	J.K. Simmons Kai
Written by Jonathan Aibel Glenn Berger	Companies DreamWorks	Seth Rogen Master Mantis
Editor Claire Knight	Animation presents In association	Lucy Liu Master Viper
Production Designer Raymond Zibach	With China Film Co., Ltd., Oriental DreamWorks, Zhong Ming You Ying Film	David Cross Master Crane
Music Hans Zimmer	Supervised by China Film Co-production Corporation	Kate Hudson Mei Mei
Supervising Sound Editors/Sound Designers Ethan Van der Ryn Erik Aadahl	Executive Producers Mike Mitchell Guillermo del Toro	James Hong Mr Ping
Animation Supervisors Ludovic Bouancheau Rodolphe Guenoden Willy Harber	Producers Jackie Chan Guillermo del Toro	Randall Duk Kim Grand Master
Voice Cast Jack Black Master Po Ping, the Dragon Warrior	Li Ruigang	Oogway Jackie Chan Master Monkey
Bryan Cranston Li Shan		Dolby Digital/Auro 11.1 In Colour [2.35:1]
Dustin Hoffman Master Shifu		Some screenings presented in 3D
Angelina Jolie Master Tigress		Distributor 20th Century Fox International (UK)
©DreamWorks		

In ancient China, young panda Po is the champion Dragon Warrior of kung fu. All the other pandas were seemingly destroyed, so Po is overjoyed when his father Li arrives in his village, seeking his long-lost son.

Kai, a centuries-old yak warlord, escapes the spirit realm and starts to steal the 'Chi' life force of kung-fu masters. Li takes Po to a hidden valley of pandas, promising to teach him to use 'Chi' but eventually confesses that he doesn't know how – he just feared losing Po again. However, Po teaches the pandas how to use their potential; when Kai arrives, they resist him together and Po tricks him back into the spirit realm. Helped by his friends' collective 'Chi', Po vanquishes Kai and returns to the mortal world.

Marguerite

France/Czech Republic/Belgium 2015

Director: Xavier Giannoli

Certificate 15 128m 39s



Chorus of disapproval: Catherine Frot

Reviewed by Hannah McGill

Loosely based on the story of the socialite and amateur soprano Florence Foster Jenkins, *Marguerite* depicts a woman whose enthusiasm for singing far outstrips her talent but whose wealth cushions her, emperor's new clothes-style, from criticism. Though frequently funny, not least at the expense of the painfully screechy arias performed by the eponymous would-be diva, the film succeeds by transcending the simple ridicule of its subject or her hypocritical entourage. Instead, aided by a warm lead performance by Catherine Frot, it offers a complex and poignant meditation on truth-telling, the function of art and the mechanics of intimate relationships. *Marguerite*'s tragedy is that all the people in her

life are invested, for different reasons, in lying to her – and, confronted with her sweetness and vulnerability, the audience at once aches for her and understands why they do it.

There's a clear homage to *Sunset Blvd.* (1950) in *Marguerite*'s relationship with her butler Madelbos (Denis Mpunga), who, while the wider world laughs at her, lovingly photographs her in exotic stage costumes and ensures the arrival of copious floral tributes after each performance. *Marguerite*, however, is no monster in the Norma Desmond mould. Her delusions of grandeur coexist with a warmth and charm that are as significant as her great wealth in persuading those around her to perpetuate the myth of her talent. Only the louche young

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by Olivier Delbos Marc Missonnier	François Musy Gabriel Hafner	Distribution a co-production of Fidélité Films, Gabriel Inc., Sirena Films, Scope Pictures, France 3 Cinéma, Jouror Cinéma, CN5 Productions with the participation of Canal+, Ciné+, France Télévisions in association with Cofinova 11, La Banque Postale	du Cinéma et de l'Image Animée with the support of Eurimages, Centre Cinématographique Tchèque	Atos Pezzini Christa Thérêt Hazel Klein	Distributor Picturehouse Entertainment
Written by Xavier Giannoli	Costume Designer Pierre-Jean Larroque			Denis Mpunga Madelbos	
Script Collaborator Marcia Romano				Sylvain Dieuaide Lucien Beaumont	
Director of Photography Glynn Speckaert	©Fidélité Films, France 3 Cinéma, Sirena Films, Scope Pictures, Jouror Cinéma, CN5 Productions, Gabriel Inc.			Aubert Fenoy Kyrill Von Priest	
Editor Cyril Nakache	Production Companies Fidélité present in association with Memento Films			Sophia Lebouitte Félicité la barbu	
Art Director Martin Kurel				Théo Cholbi Diego	
Original Music Ronan Maillard				In Colour [2.35:1]	
Sound				Subtitles	
				Cast Catherine Frot Marguerite Dumont	
				André Marcon Georges Dumont	
				Michel Fau	

Paris, the 1920s. Budding opera singer Hazel Klein arrives to perform at a charity recital hosted by a stuffy, moneyed music club. Also in attendance are journalist Lucien Beaumont and his art prankster friend Kyrill Von Priest. Headlining is the club's wealthy patroness, Marguerite Dumont, who proves to be a loveable person but a dreadful singer. Lucien writes an enigmatic review of her performance, which Marguerite takes as positive. Her butler Madelbos protects her from negative responses, photographs her in stage costumes and ensures that flowers arrive from 'admirers'. Lucien and Kyrill involve Marguerite in a surrealist happening, which emphasises her lack of talent. However, she remains as happily oblivious to mockery as she is to the infidelity of her husband Georges. Unhappy with

her radical new associates, the arts club replaces her as patron. Marguerite plans a solo recital; Georges attempts to dissuade her, but Lucien, increasingly fond of her, arranges voice lessons for her with fading opera star Pezzini. Marguerite's vocal cords suffer from the strain. She finds out about Georges's affair, and is devastated. Hazel and Lucien attend Marguerite's concert together. Her performance at first provokes laughter but her voice unexpectedly rallies – before she collapses, coughing blood. In hospital, Marguerite's delusions of being a world-famous opera singer overwhelm her reason. Her doctor resolves to bring her back to reality by playing her a recording of her voice. Georges arrives too late to prevent this. On hearing herself, Marguerite collapses; Georges cradles her.

Next to Her

Israel 2014
Director: Asaf Korman

Reviewed by Sue Harris

This moving, terribly bleak film is a deeply personal one on every level. It is the work of a husband-and-wife team, screenwriter and lead actress Liron Ben Shlush and director Asaf Korman, and is inspired by Ben Shlush's own experience of growing up with a mentally disabled younger sister. Dana Ivgy, who plays sister Gabby with remarkable conviction and sensitivity, has been friends with Korman since high school, and prepared for the role by working at the care facility in Haifa where Ben Shlush's sister now lives.

The complicity of the three resonates throughout a film in which the rawness and collusion of intimate relationships are exposed in the delineation of private spaces: a living-room sofa bed where grown women sleep together like children, a cramped bathroom where they share a toothbrush and where a calendar of their menstrual cycles looms large in the mirror. This is Chelli and Gabby's home: a place where they lock the door on the interfering normative world that would have them live more 'functionally'. The story of why they are alone in this way is not made clear; indeed, the visit of their glamorous mother early in the film is a one-off incident that leaves us none the wiser about the wider family circumstances. Her swift and unhappy visit simply reinforces the sense of the sisters' abandonment of and by the outside world. Their home is a place of safety of Chelli's making – imperfect, but a refuge acutely attuned to their unique relationship and emotional needs.

The precariousness of their isolated life and the fluidity of the rules that govern it are distressingly in evidence throughout. When Chelli leaves Gabby home alone, she returns to find her crouched on all fours, screaming and compulsively banging her head on the living-room floor. Chelli's deep reserves of compassion are seen in her tender handling of her sister: she



Liron Ben Shlush, Yaakov Daniel Zada

strokes her face gently, holds her like a baby, combs her hair and carefully feeds her. But she also reacts aggressively when Gabby starts to masturbate in bed, holding her hands back and calling this "no do" behaviour. This balancing act between nurturing and controlling is at the core of a beautifully composed scene in which the sisters are seen from above, lying peacefully together in the bath, their pale naked bodies entwined top to tail, their dark hair reinforcing their sisterly symmetry. Chelli playfully uses her foot to submerge Gabby's head in the water, making them both laugh each time she resurfaces. But then she keeps her foot a moment too long on Gabby's head, almost drowning her, her face set rigid, as if finally breaking under the strain of her own responsibilities and emotional self-neglect.

What the film does is to force their front door open and let the outside world in, in the form of a lover, professional carers, new friendships and the promise of happiness and self-fulfilment for Chelli. The twist, when it comes, is genuinely tragic, confirming Chelli's underlying fragility, highlighting the entrenched vulnerability of the women, and forcing them back into an even more intense relationship of isolation and co-dependency. 6

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Haim Mecklberg
Estee Yacov-
Mecklberg
Written by
Liron Ben Shlush
Director of
Photography
Amit Yasour
Editing
Shira Hochman
Asaf Korman
Production Designer

Ron (Zik) Zikno
Sound Designer
Ronan Nagel
Costume Design
Sarit Sharara

@2-Team Productions
(2004) Ltd.
Production
Companies
United King Films
presents a production
of 2-Team Productions

Produced with
the support of
The Rabinovich
Foundation for the
Arts - Cinema Project
with the participation
of the Leon Recanati
Foundation,
The Cultural
Administration - The
Israeli Ministry of
Culture and Sport,
The Israeli Film

Council, Small and
Medium Business
Agency - Ministry
of Economy
Developed with the
support of Geshet
Multicultural Film
Fund, The Israeli
Film Council
Executive Producers
Moshe Ederly
Leon Ederly
Yigal Mograbi

Cast
Liron Ben Shlush
Chelli
Dana Ivgy
Gabby
Yaakov Daniel Zada
Zohar
In Colour
[2.35:1]
Subtitles
Distributor

Peccadillo Pictures
Israeli theatrical title
At Li Layla

Israel, the present. School caretaker Chelli lives with her younger, severely mentally disabled sister Gabby in a rough suburb of a big coastal city. Chelli adores her sister, and is committed to being her sole carer. She is excessively protective of her, catering lovingly and patiently to Gabby's many physical needs, to the extent of sleeping next to her every night. But her possessiveness extends to a lack of faith in professional assistance, and so she leaves Gabby alone in the flat during the day while she goes to work. It is clear that this is a dangerous situation and that Gabby's safety and wellbeing are being compromised by Chelli's actions. When concerned neighbours complain to social workers about the situation, and their mother is hurt by Gabby during one of her rare visits to the flat, Chelli agrees that she can go to a day-care centre. Chelli

takes advantage of this liberty to start a relationship with Zohar, a substitute sports teacher at her school, but she initially reveals little to him of her difficult home life. As Zohar and Chelli grow closer, he gets to know Gabby, and develops a caring relationship with her. He moves into the flat with the two women, helping them to develop a better home routine, and he encourages Chelli to establish healthier boundaries with her younger sister. Their relationship seems to offer both Chelli and Gabby a more positive future, but comes to an abrupt end when it is discovered that Gabby is pregnant. Chelli suspects Zohar of sexually abusing her, and throws him out without explanation. Gabby has an abortion, and Chelli gradually realises that Gabby in fact had sex with another mentally disabled patient at the day-care group.

journalist Lucien (Sylvain Dieuaide) comes close to telling her the truth, though he too tells it slant: Marguerite's voice, he writes, "contains a human truth that rends the heart".

The awfulness of Marguerite's singing initially seems overplayed; but as the film progresses, its extreme badness seems a more necessary device, laying bare how complete both her delusion and her vulnerability are. No one could possibly pretend that she is any good – and yet they do. Her own self-deception, meanwhile, is so complete that she is able to joke about her ability just as a good singer would. "You heard me missing all those high notes!" she beams at young singer Hazel (Christa Thérét), after torturing Mozart's 'Queen of the Night' – an inadvertent truth that leaves Hazel momentarily grasping for the right lie to tell. Such moments, in which the actual truth clashes with an emotional truth and loses out, are cleverly handled. When, near the film's end, Marguerite damages her vocal cords, her husband Georges (André Marcon), who has never wanted anything more than for her to stop singing, asks with apparently genuine anguish, "Will she ever sing again?" The lie of her talent has eclipsed the truth of her lack thereof, just as the lie of their happy marriage seems to be displacing the truth of their distant and unloving relationship. Marguerite has constructed her own reality, which gives her validity as an artist.

In an ensemble of impressive performers, the little-known Dieuaide gives a standout performance as Lucien – a sort of anti-romantic lead whose self-doubt and cynicism contrast sharply with Marguerite's guileless positivity but touch the heart no less. A hinted romance with Hazel fails to materialise: love, implicitly, demands a self-delusion of which he is not capable. Not quite so fully realised is Hazel herself. Despite being presented at the start of the film as if she will be its protagonist, she ultimately serves largely to remind the audience what a nice singing voice sounds like – a character function doomed to suffer in a story that ultimately argues for passion, authenticity and kindness as greater traits than boring old expertise.

That some elements seem underdeveloped, while others are laboured over, gives the film a lumpy feel. The script can be too directive and literal, hammering home detail that might better have been allowed to sit more lightly. In its final act the story drifts into overlength and repetition – giving a sense that the filmmakers were as loath to let Marguerite go as are the motley crew of friends and hangers-on she has amassed. The closing sequence, in which Marguerite's doctor decides to try shocking her back to reality by playing her a recording of her own singing, is particularly stretched. Arguably, however, the film's rather baroque and overworked feeling, including its drained, lilac-heavy, hand-coloured look, is appropriate to its material. Some elements are suggestive of magical realism, such as the bearded lady fortune-teller who becomes one of Marguerite's cheerleaders – and it's a nice background detail that it's this particular character, not ethereally gorgeous Hazel or beloved Marguerite, who manages an honest-to-goodness sexual affair, with loyal butler Madelbos. 6

The Ones Below

United Kingdom 2015
Director: David Farr
Certificate 15 86m 17s

Reviewed by Matthew Taylor

A fraught pregnancy, a new apartment, neighbours who may have a sinister hidden agenda: as affirmed by the opening strains of Adem Ilhan's score, its queasy lullaby mimicking Krzysztof Komeda's seminal music for *Rosemary's Baby* (1968), the influence of Roman Polanski and his 'apartment trilogy' looms heavy over David Farr's accomplished debut feature. Farr is an associate director of the RSC who previously contributed scripts for Joe Wright's *Hanna* and several episodes of TV's *Spooks*, and his theatrical background is keenly displayed in this taut London-set four-hander. But while never venturing too far from the eight walls of its key locations, the film has enough style and witty visual touches to avoid an excess of staginess. It can occasionally be derivative, and falls back on some familiar psycho-thriller tropes in its later stages, but the icy poise with which Farr explores his provocative thematic material is sufficiently disquieting over the film's compact 86 minutes.

Although it's ostensibly in the realist mode, *The Ones Below* has enough hints of a heightened, off-kilter quality to make it play out as a nightmarish projection of motherhood and its attendant anxieties. At the centre of this is the pregnant Kate (Clémence Poésy), who remains unconvinced of her suitability as a parent even as long-term partner Justin (Stephen Campbell Moore) eagerly anticipates the new arrival. Having moved into a top-floor flat, they find another expectant couple – terse businessman Jon (David Morrissey) and his stridently outgoing Scandinavian wife Theresa (Laura Birn) – inhabiting the property downstairs.

Kate tentatively acquiesces to Theresa's fervent offers of company, but the friendship is cut short by a tragic event that interrupts a strained dinner party hosted by the upstairs couple. The mood is tense even before Theresa trips and falls down the stairs, losing the baby that she and Jon had tried for years to conceive. When the bereft Theresa screams at Kate, "You don't deserve that thing inside you!" you could be forgiven for bracing for an ensuing trajectory akin to the grand guignol of French shocker *Inside* (2007). That's not indulged here, but Theresa's hysterical accusation resonates deeply throughout *The Ones Below*. It speaks directly to Kate's debilitating self-doubt and inability to bond with her child – shades of Lynne Ramsay's adaptation of *We Need to Talk About Kevin*, minus the demon seed aspect – and to Theresa's burning resentment, being the naturally more maternal woman.

Following this traumatic incident, Jon and Theresa disappear to Europe, while Kate gives birth to a baby boy. When the neighbours make a surprise reappearance, Kate, plagued by sleeplessness, becomes paranoid that they may have ulterior motives for returning. The recurrent image of the downstairs couple's shoes deposited neatly outside their flat takes on a progressively more ominous pall; when Kate and Justin return from a much needed weekend away, their conspicuous presence supplies a palpable frisson of dread. Another effective visual cue nods to Hitchcock, as Farr repeatedly shows the goings-on in the neighbours' immaculately manicured garden from Kate's increasingly agitated (and isolated) point of view.



Upstairs downfall: David Morrissey, Laura Birn, Clémence Poésy, Stephen Campbell Moore

Farr and his DP Ed Rutherford give the below space a hyperreal, brightly lit texture, an almost artificial quality that cannily engages with the question of whether Kate may be imagining things. This possibility becomes the source of both tension and dark humour. The film's most exquisite moment of black comedy comes when Kate claims to have spotted a framed photograph of her son in the downstairs flat; on investigation, Justin finds instead a despondent image of Jon and Theresa in a rain-drenched rowing boat. As in Polanski's *The Tenant* (1976), there is an underpinning threat of history repeating itself – Kate, whose family has a history of mental instability, is haunted by the fear of following in the footsteps of her suicidal late brother. Kate's mother, meanwhile, is depicted as an ineffectual, frosty figure, providing the story with a further level of maternal inadequacy.

Like the basement that harbours terrors in many a horror film, the non-subterranean 'below'

here is invested with a sense of apprehension. The film bluntly plays with the psychological signifiers of its upstairs/downstairs space, with Jon and Theresa coming to resemble the uninhibited id to Kate and Justin's restrained superego ("I know how to get what I want," barks Jon in one scene, a declaration that has sinister ramifications later on). Francesca Di Mottola's production design reflects this shrewdly, with the downstairs flat dominated by brash, bright colours, in contrast to the neutral tones of the property above. While the dichotomy isn't subtle, it's in line with the intense, feverish nature of the unspooling narrative, which ultimately strains credibility with a series of bait-and-switch sequences worthy of Brian De Palma. Well performed by the quartet of actors, with Poésy especially impressive as the beleaguered Kate, it's a confident, pitiless first feature that sees Farr transition from stage to screen space with aplomb. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

Nikki Parrott

Written by

David Farr

Director of

Photography

Ed Rutherford

Editor

Chris Wyatt

Production Designer

Francesca Di Mottola

Composer

Adem Ilhan

Production

Sound Mixer

Nigel Albermarliche

Costume Designer

Sarah Blenkinsop

Production

©The Ones Below

Limited/British

Broadcasting

Corporation/The

British Film Institute

Production

Companies

BBC Films and BFI

present in association

with Protagonist

Pictures a Cuba

Pictures production

Produced in

association

with Tigerlily Films

A film by David Farr

Produced in

association with

Kreo Films

Developed by

BBC Films

Made with support of

the BFI's Film Fund

Executive Producers

Dixie Linder

Nick Marston

Ben Hall

Christine Langan

Joe Oppenheimer

Lizzie Francke

Nigel Williams

Cast

Clémence Poésy

Kate

David Morrissey

Jon

Stephen Campbell

Moore

Justin

Laura Birn

Theresa

Joseph Mills

Elliot Mills

Billy, baby

In Colour

[1.85:1]

Distributor

Icon Film Distribution

London, present day. Expecting a baby, Kate and Justin settle into their new flat. Another expectant couple, Jon and Theresa, move into the apartment below. Theresa and Kate become friends. During a dinner party hosted by Kate and Justin, Theresa slips and falls down the stairs, losing her baby. Blame Jon and Theresa their neighbours for the tragedy and relocate to Germany. Kate gives birth to Billy, but struggles to bond with him. Jon and Theresa return to London, and the couples make their peace. Plagued by sleeplessness, Kate allows Theresa to babysit Billy. Seeing Theresa taking pictures of and breastfeeding Billy, Kate sneaks into the downstairs flat, finding a nursery containing a picture of Jon, Theresa and Billy. When Kate and Justin confront Jon and Theresa, the picture has been replaced. Justin questions Kate's sanity. Tricking Justin into leaving the flat, Jon drugs and drowns Kate, staging the scene as a suicide. Theresa, disguised as Kate, abandons Billy's pram on the banks of a canal after appearing to throw the baby into the water; it's later revealed to be a bundle of clothes. Teresa and Jon return to Germany with Billy.

Only the Dead

Australia/United Kingdom 2015
Directors: Bill Guttentag, Michael Ware

Reviewed by Richard Combs

"They say only the dead have seen the end of war. Does that mean it lives in all of us, waiting to be found?" As one of narrator Michael Ware's concluding statements in his documentary on the Iraq War, co-directed with Bill Guttentag, this fairly summarises the film's ambitiously broad – philosophical? metaphysical? – approach to war, without fixing too closely on anything that happened (or continues to happen) in Iraq. It might be hard in fact to specify which of several interleaving approaches best characterises the film: documentary, biographical or confessional.

It begins, plainly and naively enough, as the account of how Ware, as a young reporter, a small-town boy from Australia, as he puts it, seized his chance to become a correspondent for *Time* magazine in Iraq, just before the US-led invasion in 2003. The film is quickly dominated by Ware's own personal motives for being there: the love of being a journalist hunting a story; the lure of a false sense of adventure; and the fortuitous importance conferred on him when he acted as intermediary between the Americans and the growing Iraqi insurgency. This leads him to confess to another motive for being there: it was "a place I was led to by my own obsession with the world's most feared terrorist".

He's not talking about Iraq here, but about the territory the film is most interested in: those dark places it asserts we all have buried within us. At the end of his seven years in Iraq he had managed "to reconcile with myself the things I'd seen, the things I'd done. But I will always know that at some unknown place, at some forgotten hour, I became a man I never thought I'd be." This personal perspective is imposed at every point on the hours of tape Ware shot with a "beat-up Handycam", his footage supplemented with archive and newsreel material and imagery supplied by the insurgents themselves of firefights and executions.

But it's a perspective which is not inherent in the visual material – and in a way is even dead-ended by the latter because this has already been made so familiar by broadcast outlets. It's a solipsistic perspective, inevitably, one which Ware is even prepared to apply beyond himself. During the battle for Fallujah in 2004, he goes in search of a missing soldier, Staff Sergeant Bellavia, inside an embattled house. He finds that Bellavia has killed five of the insurgents,



Missing peace: Michael Ware

and that he had "found something in that house, a part of him he never knew he had".

The defining moment – of both Ware's reportage and his solipsism – is when he becomes the report's leading character, after he makes contact with the insurgents and is gifted with video footage of their side of the war. The most brutal testament comes from that "most feared terrorist" – Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, who would go on to lead al-Qaeda in Iraq, which would then morph into Isis.

Given that its perspective and content are so shaped by Ware's career in Iraq, it's not surprising that *Only the Dead* barely relates to more current events, which makes it seem strangely curtailed as a documentary – but then the 'documentary' label may not be necessary anyway, since the film's strongest feature is its vivid, on-the-ground coverage of the street fighting in Fallujah and Ramadi. In this it's more like recent feature films that have taken on Iraq – its close-quarters combat footage rivals *American Sniper*. And with its commentary rife with statements such as, "the brutality of it all having slowly shaved away at our souls", it fits well with the redefinition of the war-film genre since *Apocalypse Now*. Whether that dramatic remit can be usefully applied to Iraq is another matter. Ⓢ

The Other Side of the Door

USA/United Kingdom/Germany 2015
Director: Johannes Roberts
Certificate 15 95m 35s

Reviewed by Anton Bitel

In *The Other Side of the Door*, Maria Harwood, suicidal with grief and guilt at the drowning of her young son Oliver in a car accident, takes the desperate measure – on the advice of her housekeeper Piki – of having the boy's corpse disinterred and reduced to ashes so that she can try to raise his soul at an abandoned South Indian temple for one last goodbye. With fairytale inevitability, Maria (Sarah Wayne Callies) breaks the strict rules attached to the ritual and opens the temple door to readmit her son to the world of the living – but in a sense, merely by endeavouring to resurrect the dead, she has already transgressed the sacrosanct laws of nature. It cannot end well.

Directed and co-written by genre filmmaker Johannes Roberts (*F, Storage 24*) and shot in Mumbai, *The Other Side of the Door* is full of thresholds and liminal spaces – not just the temple's barred entrance but also the door to Oliver's attic bedroom (the injunction on its exterior, 'Keep out, Lucy', as blithely ignored by his sister as Piki's instructions are by Maria), the seashores and riverbanks where the ashes of the dead are released, and the precinct around the Harwoods' house, which is soon invaded by ghosts, Aghori mystic necromancers and a monstrous chthonic gatekeeper (Javier Botet). Meanwhile the American Maria's cultural alienation in her Indian surroundings – only her antiques-trading husband Michael (Jeremy Sisto) knows any Hindi – represents another barrier to be crossed, as she must embrace local ritual to address her own personal crisis.

That crisis lies at the centre of Roberts's film, whose supernatural scenarios always remain grounded in the tangible sense of grief and loss suffered by Maria (and also, more quietly, by Michael). When Maria says, "You know I love you, right – more than life itself," she may be speaking through a barred door



Dead zone: Jeremy Sisto, Sofia Rosinsky

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Patrick McDonald
Michael Ware
Written by
Michael Ware
Additional Writing:
Justine A. Rosenthal
Editor
Jane Moran
Music
Michael Yezerski
Sound Editors
Steve Burgess
Leah Katz

©OTD Holdings Pty Ltd, Screen Australia, Screen Queensland Pty Ltd and Foxtel

Management Pty Ltd
Production Companies
Screen Australia presents a Penance Films, Wolfhound Pictures production in association with Screen Queensland and Foxtel
Offset financing provided by Metrol Technology, Kreo Films
Developed and filmed with the assistance of Screen Queensland
Principal investor: Screen Australia
Executive Producer

Justine A. Rosenthal

In Colour
[L78:1]
Part-subtitled

Distributor
Dogwoof

In February 2003, Australian journalist Michael Ware becomes a 'Time' magazine correspondent in Iraq. He is afraid that he will be too far behind the other correspondents after the US-led invasion, and is shaken when another journalist is killed by a roadside bomb. He witnesses a growth in insurgency activity: the suicide bombing of the Jordanian embassy and the UN headquarters. He makes contact with the insurgents and is given video evidence of their attacks; his sense of guilty complicity intensifies when the terrorist Abu Musab al-Zarqawi gives him footage that includes the beheading of US contractor Nicholas Berg. He witnesses the American struggle to wrest the town of Fallujah from al-Zarqawi in 2004 and joins one of the beleaguered US units in Ramadi. Al-Zarqawi is killed by a US air strike in 2006. Finally, after seven years in Iraq, Ware returns home.

to a revenant beyond, but she is also laying bare the intensity of maternal grief that has led already her to one suicide attempt and will underlie her final climactic act, when South Asian mysticism collides with the self-sacrifice of *The Exorcist* (1973).

Roberts respectfully acknowledges his many inspirations. Robert Wise's *Audrey Rose* (1977) is evoked by the Hindu reincarnation mythos; Mary Lambert's *Pet Sematary* (1989) is summoned by the death of Lucy's beloved pets and another 'Indian burial ground'; and a fugitive little girl, a fixation on drowning, restorative sex and the odd flash of red all conjure that urtext of obsessive parental mourning, Nicolas Roeg's *Don't Look Now* (1973). The Harwood home exteriors were all shot at Rudyard Kipling's birthplace – portal to a long history of Anglo-Indian relations – and the film's ongoing intertextuality with Kipling's *The Jungle Book* (Oliver's favourite book) frames the departed child as a little boy lost in a dangerous place of otherness. Though hardly original, Roberts's film lets into its haunted spaces all manner of rich texture and well-crafted spookery. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by Alexandre Aja Rory Aitken Ben Pugh	© Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation and TSG Entertainment Finance LLC	Cast Sarah Wayne Callies Maria Harwood Jeremy Sisto Michael Harwood Sofia Rosinsky Lucy Harwood Logan Creran Oliver Harwood Suchitra Pillai Piki Javier Botet Myrtu
Written by Johannes Roberts Ernest Riera	Production Companies Twentieth Century Fox presents a 42/Fire Axe Pictures production	In Colour [2.35:1]
Director of Photography Maxime Alexandre	Music Joseph Bishara	Distributor 20th Century Fox International (UK)
Film Editor Baxter	Production Designer David Bryan	
Production Sound Recordist Ashok Kumar	Executive Producers Tim Cole Josh Varney	
Costume Designers Divya Gambhir Nidhi Gambhir		

Mumbai, India. Pregnant Maria and her husband Michael decide to move permanently from America. Six years later, Maria is still grieving and guilt-ridden after rescuing herself and daughter Lucy from a car accident in which son Oliver drowned. After Maria attempts suicide, local housekeeper Piki tells her of an abandoned temple where the dead can be raised for one final goodbye, though she warns Maria to keep Oliver on the other side of the temple door. Maria carries out the ritual, but opens the door. Back home in Mumbai, as plants and pet birds die in the house, Lucy and Maria become aware of Oliver's ghostly presence. Despite their initial joy, the boy's spirit becomes increasingly aggressive; meanwhile other presences, both the necromantic Aghori and underworld goddess Myrtu, keep appearing with claims on Oliver. Piki warns Maria that all trace of the returned Oliver must be erased. Attempting to burn Oliver's belongings, Piki is drawn to the garden pond by the spectre of her own dead daughter, and drowned. When Maria tells the truth to Michael, Lucy (now possessed by Oliver) refuses to back Maria up. Thinking that Maria is mad, Michael locks her in the bedroom. Lucy knives Michael. The Aghori grab Lucy and attempt to stab her ritually. Maria takes Oliver's spirit into herself, promising to stay with him for ever, and lets the Aghori stab her instead. Maria is awakened outside the temple by Michael, who opens the door.

Our Brand Is Crisis

USA 2015

Director: David Gordon Green

Certificate 15 107m 18s

Reviewed by Jasper Sharp

Our Brand Is Crisis follows Robert Zemeckis's *The Walk* (2015) in recasting an award-winning documentary as a fiction feature, and again it's an attempt to reach a wider audience that ultimately yields diminished returns. Here the source is Rachel Boynton's 2005 film of the same name, which detailed the disruptive entry of Washington consultancy Greenberg Carville Shrum (GCS) into the already chaotic world of Bolivian politics. Hired to stage-manage the 2002 re-election campaign of Gonzalo 'Goni' Sánchez de Lozada, a successful US-raised businessman who had been president between 1993-97, GCS successfully snatched victory from the hands of close rival Evo Morales, a candidate who represented the country's disproportionately poor indigenous people. A year later, violent anti-government riots broke out on the streets of La Paz, and Sánchez de Lozada subsequently resigned.

The premise of this light-heartedly satirical take on the material will surely resound with those who are disillusioned with the contemporary fixation on focus groups, negative campaigning and PR spin. However, while occupying similar territory to Barry Levinson's *Wag the Dog* (1997), in which a phoney war with Albania is fabricated for the American media to distract attention from a presidential sex scandal, here the fundamental misrepresentation of the real-life players and events informing the plot is problematic.

Understandably, names have been changed in the pull in focus from local specifics to a more general message of cynicism. Sánchez de Lozada becomes Pedro Castillo, while Morales, the Chávez-esque champion of the common man, is renamed Victor Rivera. A more significant dramatic concession is Sandra Bullock's casting in the lead role as Jane Bodine, a free agent lured out of self-imposed retirement for whom this one last mission offers the chance to overcome personal demons. Her abrasive relationship with her teammates and her hot-headed determination to win at all costs have earned her the nickname



In a spin: Sandra Bullock, Billy Bob Thornton

'Calamity Jane'. Apart from the change in gender, the character is a far cry from the more blandly corporate GCS chief strategist she's modelled on, Jeremy Rosner (who, in the original documentary coolly describes his company's *modus operandi* as "progressive politics and foreign policy for profit").

Bodine's strategy for winning over public sympathy for an otherwise unsympathetic client is to hammer home the message that the country is on the brink of collapse and only Castillo's hard-nosed brand of market-based economics can save the day. "You change the narrative to fit the man, not the man to fit the narrative," she says, after a potential PR catastrophe when Castillo turns his fists on an angry member of the public. It's a philosophy the filmmakers themselves appear to have embraced. Name changes aside, screenwriter Peter Straughan's narrative deviates drastically from Boynton's, most notably through the introduction of Billy Bob Thornton as Pat Candy, whose main function is to drip-feed revelations of the earlier career disaster that led to Bodine's drug abuse and nervous breakdown.

That Morales did not hire a foreign strategy team in the 2002 election is beside the point, and the role served by Morales's fictional counterpart Rivera is purely a token one. Within this ultimately all-American drama, Bolivia feels relegated to little more than an exotic backdrop of poverty and llama gags, and the overarching message is that while US-style politicking has its failures, it is still the only kind that counts. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by Grant Heslov George Clooney	Music David Wingo	Production Companies Warner Bros. Pictures presents in association with Participant Media and RatPac-Dune Entertainment	Jonathan King Steven Mnuchin	Nell Scot McNairy Buckley Zoe Kazan LeBlanc Dominic Flores Hugo Reynaldo Pacheco Eddie Louis Arcella Victor Rivera Octavio Gómez Berrios Pepe	Luis Chávez Abraham
Screenplay Peter Straughan Suggested by the documentary by Rachel Boynton	Production Sound Mixer Chris Gebert	Costumes Designed by Jenny Eagan	Cast Sandra Bullock Jane Bodine Billy Bob Thornton Pat Candy Anthony Mackie Ben Joaquim de Almeida Pedro Castillo Ann Dowd	Dolby Digital In Colour [1.85:1] Part-subtitled	Distributor Warner Bros. Pictures International (UK)
Director of Photography Tim Orr	Edited by Colin Patton	Production Designer Richard A. Wright	Executive Producers Sandra Bullock Stuart Besser Jeff Skoll		

Political strategist Jane Bodine is lured out of retirement to manage the 2002 presidential campaign of Bolivian politician Pedro Castillo. Arriving in La Paz with her colleagues, she discovers that Pat Candy, her rival from the US campaign, is handling the strategy for opposing candidate Victor Rivera, who represents the country's majority indigenous people.

Castillo is viewed by the Bolivian public as an arrogant careerist representing international business interests, and is languishing in the polls.

Jane promotes the idea that only his radical changes can save the country from disaster. She launches a smear campaign against Rivera and the other candidates. Castillo's popularity rises and he is elected. Within days, however, violent protests erupt on the streets when Castillo reneges on his promise not to open Bolivia up to foreign investment.

Heading to the airport to return to the US, Jane jumps out of her car to remain in Bolivia as a charity worker.

Papusza

France 2013

Directors: Joanna Kos-Krauze, Krzysztof Krauze

Reviewed by Hannah McGill

It takes an outsider – a *gadjo* – to tell the gypsy Papusza (Jowita Budnik) what she is doing when she forms images with words in order to soothe her child to sleep. “Papusza,” says Jerzy (Antoni Pawlicki), “you are a poet.” “And who is a poet?” asks Papusza, not sounding particularly interested. Offered the definition “one who makes up songs”, she responds, “I thought the mermaids made up songs.”

The mix of romanticism, whimsy and earthy practicality in that scene – it’s not wholly clear whether Papusza is serious about the mermaids or is playing up to gypsy stereotype – is characteristic of this earnest, sporadically spirited biopic of a celebrated Romani poet. Papusza (‘Doll’) was the childhood nickname and adult literary identity of Bronisława Wajs – a legacy, according to the film’s narrative at least, of her mother being young enough at the time of her birth to still hanker after a doll to play with. Jerzy, meanwhile, was Polish poet Jerzy Ficowski, who discovered and translated her work during the time he spent travelling with the Polish Roma in the late 1950s.

Revelling throughout in painterly compositions and gorgeous photography, Krzysztof Krauze and Joanna Kos-Krauze’s film visits Papusza at various times in her life. At her birth, a kinswoman foretells that “she will either bring everyone great shame or great pride”; as a child, she is set apart by her urgent quest to learn how to read; and adulthood brings both recognition and disapproval her way.


If Jerzy’s efforts to publicise Papusza’s poetry are motivated by a genuine respect for her community and its creative traditions, outside interest is a double-edged sword for her people. Both Papusza and Jerzy are accused of making gypsy secrets public. It’s a conundrum that resonates with many more recent debates over the exoticisation of, and appropriation from, minority cultures: the aid and investment the Polish Romani of the 1950s need in order to acquire housing and education demand a degree



Double-edged sword: Paloma Migra

of assimilation that dilutes their shared identity and brings them into conflict with one another; so too does the public awareness of their culture that’s required to combat prejudice against them.

In her personal life too Papusza is torn between, on the one hand, adherence to the rules of a community that disdains her learning and forces her into marriage with a mean-spirited older man and, on the other, her desire for a more conventional existence. Like many an artist, she feels she belongs nowhere; unlike other artists, she experiences no pride in her creativity. “How are they mine?” she says of her poems. “They come and go as they please.”

Krzysztof Ptak and Wojciech Staron’s black-and-white cinematography is an aptly sombre fit for a storytelling mode that accentuates the most tragic aspects of Papusza’s existence, portraying her more as a victim of fate than as a resilient creative spirit. The film’s unrelenting sadness offers a sobering counter to patronising clichés about irrepressible gypsy glee, and emphasises the past and present privations suffered by that community. More recourse to Papusza’s poetry might have given the audience a little more to cling to. She remains an intriguing enigma, entirely resistant to the customary rules of the biopic: an artist for whom inspiration was a randomly assigned burden, fame meant exclusion and acclaim brought only sorrow. 

The Pearl Button

France/Chile/Spain/Germany/Switzerland/USA 2015

Director: Patricio Guzmán

Reviewed by Maria Delgado

The Atacama desert, protagonist of Patricio Guzmán’s dazzling *Nostalgia for the Light* (2010), also features as a supporting player in his new film, *The Pearl Button*: this time, the place renowned as the driest on earth is linked to Chile’s expansive 2,670-mile oceanic coastline. Images of the vast antennae of the Atacama observatory’s uber-telescope, looking out to the heavens like giant robotic sunflowers, are presented alongside shots of glaciers, rivers and seas, as Guzmán explores water’s role as a flowing intermediary force between the stars and human life. As with *Nostalgia for the Light*, the film is contemplative poetry, in which these images meld with Guzmán’s lyrical commentary to provide both a personal and political journey across his nation’s history and psyche.

Guzmán constantly links the skies to the seas. Overhead shots of Chile’s coastline position the film as one where the director looks down with a sense of perspective and depth – he describes the view of a huge labyrinth of intersecting waterways as “an archipelago of rain”. There are shots, too, of comets and stars, thrillingly captured from below – flashes of colour in the night sky. Also at ground level, the camera constantly observes water flowing: the sound of water – running, dripping, falling – functions (echoing the words of anthropologist Claudio Mercado) as a “source of music”, a soothing soundtrack to the action. The sound of the slowly crumbling glaciers of Patagonia – imposing crystalline structures shimmering in the light – serves too as a reminder of the ecological challenges of global warming.

This is, however, no simple nature documentary. Guzmán’s cutting links these striking shots of glaciers and other natural formations to the stones carved by the indigenous peoples who populated Chile’s coastal areas until the arrival of European colonisers in the 19th century. Black-and-white photographs and grainy footage point to a now eradicated way of life, in which the Kawésqar, Selk’nam, Aoniken, Hausch and Yámana navigated the country’s coasts and waterways. The dots and stripes painted on the bodies of the Selk’nam people are captured in frozen images that hark back to comets and stars. Theirs was a culture that believed in life after death: humans transformed into stars in a cosmology binding the skies and the seas. The Kawésqar water people, according to 19th-century records, were once a population of 8,000, with 300 canoes, but now only 20 direct descendants remain. Interviews with three of them, Cristina, Gabriela and Martín, testify to a life in which “we are barely allowed in the sea”. Martín poignantly demonstrates how to canoe, in a craft that is now kept on land; the irony is not lost on the viewer.

The Pearl Button is thus crucially a film about memory. Cristina, Gabriela and Martín, prompted to recall a few Kawésqar words, reveal that ‘police’ and ‘God’ don’t exist in that language. Ultimately, Guzmán links the search to make sense of our past with a need to understand the universe. Art becomes a mode of commenting on the past – this happens not merely through Guzmán’s own discourse but also in artist Emma Malig’s map of the country, laid out like a giant, never-ending beanstalk on

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

Lambros Ziotas

Written by

Joanna Kos-Krauze

Krzysztof Krauze

Cinematography

Krzysztof Ptak

Wojciech Staron

Editing

Krzysztof

Szpetmanski

Production Design

Anna Wunderlich

Music

Jan Kanty

Pawłusiewicz

Sound

Mateusz Adamczyk

Jaroslav Bajdowski

Sebastian Witkowski

Costume Designer

Barbara Sikorska-

Bouffal

©Argomedia Sp z o.o.

TVP S.A., Canal+

Studio Filmowe KADR

Production

Companies

Telewizja Polska

S.A., Canal+, Studio

Filmowe KADR,

Polski Instytut

Sztuki Filmowej,

Argomedia present

Produced by

Argomedia SP Z.O.O.

Co-producers

Telewizja Polska S.A.,

Agencia Filmowa,

Canal+, Studio

Filmowe KADR

Film co-financed by

Polish Film Institute

Cast

Jowita Budnik

Papusza

Antoni Pawlicki

Jerzy Ficowski

Zbigniew Walerys

Dionizy Wajs

Paloma Migra

young Papusza

In Black & White

[1.85:1]

Subtitles

Distributor

New Wave Films

Rural Poland, 1910. A baby is born to a teenage gypsy girl and named ‘Papusza’. The baby is deemed by her relatives to bear a curse that will bring her glory or infamy. Papusza’s life is revisited at various stages. As an old woman, she is released from prison in time to see her poems performed as an opera libretto. As a young wife and mother, she befriends poet Jerzy, who encourages her to write. In adolescence, Papusza is determined to learn how to read, trading stolen chickens for reading lessons. Her Romani elders oppose her efforts, and she blames herself when her community’s camp is burned down and the gypsies are driven from the town. Papusza’s family marries her off to her drunken step-uncle Dionizy. When war breaks out, the gypsies are massacred; Papusza saves a child and raises him as her own. Later, government efforts to house and educate gypsy people mean that Dionizy and Papusza obtain a home and a place at school for their child, but they live in poverty. Jerzy writes a book about the gypsies, quoting Papusza’s poetry. Cast out by her people for revealing gypsy secrets, Papusza has a breakdown. Dionizy dies. The widowed Papusza refuses Jerzy’s offer to provide her with accommodation in Warsaw.



The stars look down: *The Pearl Button*


crisp sky-blue paper, and Paz Errázuriz's portraits of coastal communities. Guzmán's film is framed as one of a series of interconnecting stories addressing the invisibility of this dwindling population.

These maritime tribes were largely eradicated within 50 years of the arrival of European settlers. Gruesome photographs show them being pursued as prey – body parts securing financial gain for the hunters. In the early 1970s, Salvador Allende's social revolution generated a move to return land to these native populations, but Pinochet's coup d'état obliterated any progressive initiatives. In his three-part epic *The Battle of Chile* (1975-79), Guzmán argued for the need to remember events erased by Pinochet's ideological agenda. *The Pearl Button* follows this cinematic journey, inscribing the tales of the disappeared into its very fabric. The tale of

Jemmy Button is a case in point. Exchanged in 1830 for a mother-of-pearl button – hence the name he was given – the indigenous teen was one of four Fuegians taken to England by Captain Robert FitzRoy to be 'civilised'. Guzmán reframes this as a tale of barbarism, with the returning Button made into an exile in his own land.

At the film's end, another pearl button appears, this one found on the remains of a body dumped at sea during the Pinochet era, linking Jemmy and others like him to the disappeared. The seas are shown to be cemeteries of the dead. Just as the Atacama desert in *Nostalgia for the Light* fossilised the bodies of the disappeared, so the sea similarly and eerily preserved the agonised face of Marta Ugarte, whose washed-up body was one of an estimated 1,200-1,400 thought to have been tossed into the ocean by Pinochet's forces.

During the Pinochet regime, 800 secret detention centres policed by 3,500 civil servants oversaw a culture of extermination and silence. Dawson Island, the missionary base where hundreds of indigenous peoples died in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, became the site of one of the most notorious concentration camps, where 700 Allende supporters were imprisoned and tortured. A black-and-white photograph from the 1970s is recreated in colour as a moving image, as a mode of allowing those who were imprisoned there the opportunity to narrate their stories. Writer and journalist Javier Rebollo forensically recreates the process of disposing of the bodies of the disappeared. Chile's culture of impunity is thus mapped across contexts that habitually remain all too conveniently separated.

If, as the poet Raúl Zurita testifies, the process of returning the dead is about allowing the living to grieve, *The Pearl Button* is ultimately about cinema's unique way of retelling the past, about a visual language that links Pinochet's victims to the Yámana peoples through the image of a button. Water is ultimately the conduit that Guzmán uses to bind the different memories into a bold, poetic narrative that asks profound questions of humanity and indeed of cinema's responsibilities to the wider world. 

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Renate Sachse
Screenplay
Patricio Guzmán
Cinematography
Katell Djiian
Editor
Emmanuelle Joly
Original Music
Miranda & Tobar
Sound Recording

Alvaro Silva Wuth
@Atacama
Productions, Valdivia
Film, Mediapro,
France 3 Cinéma
Production
Companies
Atacama Productions
presents an Atacama
Productions, Valdivia

Film, Mediapro,
France 3 Cinéma
co-production
With the participation
of France Télévisions,
Centre National du
Cinéma et de l'Image
Animée, Consejo
Nacional de la Cultura
y de las Artes, Ciné+,
WDR, RTS Radio

Télévision Suisse
With the support of
Consejo Nacional
de la Cultura y de
las Artes, MEDIA
Programme of the
European Union,
CNC (Nouvelles
technologies
en production),
Sundance Institute

Documentary Film
Program, SCAM
Executive Producer
Adrien Oumhani
Film Extracts
*The Judge and the
General* (2008)
Terre Magellaniche
(1933)
In Colour

[1.85:1]
Subtitles

Distributor
New Wave Films

French theatrical title
Le Bouton de nacre

A documentary in which the Chilean filmmaker Patricio Guzmán voices a narrative linking the disappeared indigenous peoples of his country's coastal areas with the disappeared of Augusto Pinochet's 1973-90 dictatorship. Images of the Atacama desert, the world's driest location, are followed by a journey to the country's extreme south. Glaciers and natural formations in Patagonia are presented alongside stones carved by the five groups of indigenous people who made their homes along the coast before colonialism wiped out their way of life: the Kawésqar, Selk'nam, Aoniken, Haush and Yámana. Drawing on the contributions of artists, anthropologists and writers, Guzmán explores

the devastating impact the arrival of European settlers had on these communities in the 19th century. Descendants of the Kawésqar people share stories with the filmmaker. The Pinochet regime is shown to have stalled the progressive measures introduced by Salvador Allende's previous government in relation to the native population. Hundreds of the 'disappeared' were thrown into the sea by Pinochet's military forces; a pearl button found on one of the pieces of railway track used to weight down the bodies is linked to the story of Jemmy Button, a Yámana teenager taken to Europe in 1830 by an English sea captain. Guzmán presents water as the channel linking past and present.

Power in Our Hands

United Kingdom 2015
Director: Angela Spielsinger
Certificate PG 75m 5s

Reviewed by Trevor Johnston

Turning social history into documentary fare, typically cutting and pasting archive footage and contextualising interview material, has become a commonplace on cinema and TV screens, yet it's relatively rare to come across a film that for many viewers will offer a completely fresh viewpoint on decades of British life. It only takes a few grainy clips from the 1930s to prompt the realisation that here are images we really haven't seen before – capturing the daily experiences of deaf people in years gone by. The simple presence of these individuals signing on screen essentially places a hitherto invisible community before our eyes, while the rest of the film's running time offers a valuable recap on the extraordinary journey that Britain's deaf populace have made from an era when they were more or less hidden away to the present situation of a self-confident minority standing up for rights and recognition.

The film was made to mark the 125th anniversary of the British Deaf Association, so it's unsurprising that much of the vintage footage covers this representative organisation's national congress through the decades, where its dances and amateur dramatic contests performed a valuable social function. Also featured are the Deaf Clubs it sponsored across the country, bringing, as various elderly witnesses attest, a lifeline of companionship for otherwise isolated families and individuals. The shots of deaf cricket matches, deaf football and deaf athletics organised at local and national level are striking indeed, yet they point to the deaf community's determination to enjoy the same competitive leisure activities that hearing citizens have long taken for granted. Indeed, what comes out most strongly in the film's historical overview is the profound shift in deaf lives, emphasising the contrast between the well-meaning but often controlling



These films give us an insight
into the British Deaf community

Sign of the times: *Power in Our Hands*

Pride and Prejudice and Zombies

USA/United Kingdom 2015

Director: Burr Steers

Certificate 15 107m 44s

Reviewed by Tim Hayes

Labelling *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* a one-joke comedy tips us straight into the semantics briar patch, but there it is. Seth Grahame-Smith's book of the same name filleted the text of Jane Austen's novel and implanted material about the Bennet family's woes in a zombie-infested England, but the author took it for granted that a walloping pop-culture incongruity was absurd enough on its own to remove the need for much actual hilarity. Tethered remorselessly to Austen's prose – which for all its global appeal and feminist story is no firework display – the book never attempts the kind of vertical take-off that was achieved through sheer language by Terry Pratchett, to name just one fellow trafficker in the art of fantasy-splicing.

The film adaptation has the same problem, but director Burr Steers makes the best of it by deploying the devices available on screen but denied on the page: reaction shots, some 15-certificate jumps and droll underplaying by a game cast. And anyway, the Bennet sisters speaking Austenese while honing their kung fu is a better visual joke than textual one in the first place. Steers's restraint arises partly from limited resources, but it initially spares *Zombies* from the fate of *Abraham Lincoln: Vampire Hunter* (2012), Grahame-Smith's subsequent book, already delivered to the screen by no less a thunderer than Timur Bekmambetov. Lily James's Elizabeth has a nice way with exasperation, and Matt Smith chews on the unctuous Parson Collins as if relishing a steak, although the film is pinched wholesale by Lena Headey, imperious in leather boots and eyepatch as Lady Catherine and radiating disdain from every pore.

The second half then crashes in a heap of predictably bigger business. Steers shovels on extra baggage about the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse, while contradictory zombie lore is invented off the cuff. The chief villain turns out to have been passing as human for years by suppressing his appetites, casting a certain amount of doubt over the whole zombie business



A familiar vein: Lily James

model. By then, a wandering mind is picturing other Austen-adjacent scenarios, most attractively the five minutes of *Red Dwarf* where the android Kryten rolls into Jane Austen World in a tank and blows the Bennets to bits. Philip José Farmer put Elizabeth Bennet into his Wold Newton network of fantastical characters and made her Tarzan's great-great-grandmother, which seems a richer and more meaningful exploitation of fiction's glorious alchemies than having her kick a zombie in the nuts to a thumping soundtrack.

Alchemy is not the aim here. As with *Abraham Lincoln* – and *Hansel & Gretel: Witch Hunters* (2013), whose similarities aren't exactly camouflaged – the film perches less than comfortably in a very modern niche. Neither parodies nor authentic satires, these films should have as their motivating force the same hands-on remodelling of pop-culture sprites at work in *Mad* magazine or Marvel's venerable *What If...?* comic. But that kind of pragmatic charm can't possibly survive the impact of even a modest \$30m ballooning and the need for a climactic slow-motion explosion. The actual motivating force, as usual, is studios' corporate will to power, and faith in the current prescription of kinetics and violence and postmodern sarcasm as the approved ways to pass the time. These films are adrift on the cultural tides, existing only so that they may exist. **S**

ministrations of hearing 'missioners' – the usually church-appointed individuals who once shaped the daily lives of many deaf families – and symbolic milestones such as the 1971 name change from the British Deaf and Dumb Association to the British Deaf Association, the 1983 election of the body's first deaf chairman and its recent (as yet unsuccessful) campaign for the recognition of British Sign Language as a language in its own right.

With signing interviewees including recent key BDA movers and shakers, and respect given to the previous leaders who moved the organisation forwards, all this amounts to a valuable résumé of issues that have faced the community past and present – including pioneering use of video technology to record sign-language debates aimed at building confidence and articulacy, and the drive to train more deaf teachers of BSL. In formal terms at least, it's a fairly functional assemblage, with an ungratifyingly muzaky background score, yet overall the film's very existence offers a worthwhile moment for the deaf community to take stock of its own achievements, while also giving hearing viewers a guided tour of an alternative universe they may feel slightly chastened to have known so little about. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Camera Fifi Garfield Paul Gwilliams	Association, Heritage Lottery Fund, Flashing Lights	[178:1] Subtitles
Editor Kirsty Edwards	Executive Producer Sarah Towner	Distributor Independent Cinema Office
Dubbing Mixer Al Forbes	archive commentators Wendy Daunt Clark Denmark John Hay	
©British Deaf Association Production Companies British Deaf	In Colour	

Footage from the British Deaf Association's Deaf Visual Archive combines with interview testimony in this documentary tracing the recent history of the deaf community in the UK. Early in the last century, deaf people were essentially viewed as second-class citizens, often in low-paid jobs, and discouraged from signing in public. The British Deaf and Dumb Association (as it then was) supported Deaf Clubs across the country, which offered a much needed social outlet, but the lives of deaf people were still heavily dependent on the involvement of hearing 'missioners' who assisted with employment and even arranged marriages. The growth of summer schools and a higher-profile national BDDA congress contributed to a growing cohesion in the deaf community, while a 1971 vote dropped the term 'Dumb' from the organisation's name, and a subsequent BDA initiative investigated the grammatical structure of British Sign Language and concluded that it qualified as a language in its own right. By the 1980s the use of new video technology brought innovative visual programming by and for the deaf community, which was becoming more politically active as the notion of 'Deaf Pride' gained traction. A campaign to persuade the government to recognise BSL as a language brought deaf protesters to the streets of London in 2000, and although the battle for such recognition continues today, the establishment of a BSL Teacher Training Agency and a growing determination to document the deaf experience sees the community continuing to advance in self-reliance and self-confidence.

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by Marc Butan Brian Oliver Tyler Thompson Natalie Portman Annette Savitch Sean McKittick Allison Shearmur	Production Companies Cross Creek Pictures present a Sierra Pictures, MadRiver Pictures, QC Entertainment, Allison Shearmur Productions, Handsomecharlie Films production in association with Head Gear Films A film by Burr Steers	Jack Huston George Wickham Bella Heathcote Jane Bennet Douglas Booth Mr Charles Bingley Matt Smith Parson Collins Charles Dance Mr Bennet Lena Headey Lady Catherine de Bourgh Sally Phillips Mrs Bennet Emma Greenwell Caroline Bingley Ellie Bamber Lydia Bennet Millie Brady Mary Bennet Suki Waterhouse Kitty Bennet
Screenplay Burr Steers Based on the Quirk Books classic by Jane Austen, Seth Grahame-Smith Director of Photography Remi Adefarasin Edited by Padraic McKinley Production Designer Dave Warren Music Fernando Velázquez Supervising Sound Editor Martyn Zub Costume Designer Julian Day	Executive Producers Sue Baden-Powell Lauren Selig Compton Ross Phil Hunt Edward H. Hamm Jr Aleen Keshishian Nick Meyer Kimberly Fox	Dolby Digital In Colour [2.35:1] Distributor Lionsgate UK
©PPZ Holdings, LLC	Cast Lily James Elizabeth Bennet Sam Riley Mr Fitzwilliam Darcy	

Regency-era England. The Bennet family, including Elizabeth and her four sisters, live in a country estate fortified against the zombies who maraud around the surrounding countryside. All the sisters are skilled warriors, trained in Chinese martial arts and mentored by their father. The arrival of wealthy Charles Bingley and his friend Fitzwilliam Darcy raises the prospect of marriage for the eldest Bennet sister, Jane, and an end to the family's financial difficulties. After fighting off a zombie attack, Bingley and Jane become attracted to each other, but Elizabeth takes an immediate dislike to Darcy. Her feelings harden when Wickham, a visiting soldier, tells her more about Darcy's history. Elizabeth and Wickham devise a way to solve the zombie crisis, but are rebuffed by Darcy and his aunt Lady Catherine, a renowned fighter. Darcy leaves for zombie-besieged London, but writes to Elizabeth to explain his actions and correct her misapprehensions. When her youngest sister elopes with Wickham, Elizabeth follows, eventually settling her differences with Darcy and fighting alongside him.

It transpires that Wickham has been the leader of the zombies all along; he is defeated. Bingley marries Jane, and Darcy marries Elizabeth, while the still-surviving Wickham and the zombie horde attack again.

Remember

Director: Atom Egoyan

Reviewed by Jason Anderson

When *Remember*'s unlikely Nazi-hunter finds a familiar figure lurking in a cluttered American basement during his search for the SS officer who murdered his family at Auschwitz, some viewers may believe that our hero has discovered someone even more deserving of his vengeance. Indeed, he may have found Hitler himself, albeit a shaggy elderly version in an unflattering blue tracksuit. Of course, Bruno Ganz is seen here in a very different guise than the one he famously took in *Downfall* (2004). Yet the casting of the actor – as well as the film's use of Jürgen Prochnow, who has his own long history of playing Nazis – is one of many elements that illustrate the undercurrent of sly humour in Atom Egoyan's thriller, the Canadian director's most satisfying effort in a decade.

Indeed, *Remember*'s most Hitchcockian qualities make it easier to forgive the film for its preposterousness. Egoyan may be well aware of the high suspension of disbelief demanded by many of the twists and turns in the script, written by Benjamin August. One tip-off is the extra emphasis Canadian actor Henry Czerny gives to the line, "I can't believe this is happening." Though spoken after Czerny's character learns of his 90-year-old father Zev's daylight escape from his care home, the same sentiment is elicited by many developments in a film that essentially recasts the Jewish revenge fantasies of *Marathon Man* (1976) and *Inglourious Basterds* (2009) as a geriatric variation on *Memento* (2000). The gotcha ending may take matters one Shyamalan too far.

At the same time, *Remember* boasts more wit and elegance than *Chloe* (2009) and *The Captive* (2014), two other Egoyan thrillers that could be just as risible but were far more lugubrious. His new film's relative fleet-footedness has much to do with Christopher Plummer's spry



Guarded: Christopher Plummer, Dean Norris

performance as the dementia-afflicted Zev, the man who knew too little. Delivering his most dexterous leading turn since Terry Gilliam's ill-fated *The Imaginarium of Doctor Parnassus* (2009), Plummer continually shifts between Zev's default mode of grandfatherly affability (especially in his many encounters with children), his lapses into vacant-eyed passivity and the subsequent flashes of anger, confusion and despair. Much as he's caught in a painful cycle of ever-renewable grief as he forgets and recalls the death of his wife, Zev is constantly getting on and off buses and trains but seems to be forever arriving in the same city.

There's something unaccountably strange and affecting about the sight of Zev padding around in a red bathrobe in a stranger's house, having apparently forgotten that he's killed not just his anti-Semitic, Nazi-loving host (gamely played by *Breaking Bad*'s Dean Norris) but his dog, too. In such moments, Egoyan discovers a murkier, weirder movie under the excessively clever one he's ostensibly directing. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Robert Lantos
Ari Lantos
Written by
Benjamin August
Director of Photography
Paul Sarossy
Editor
Christopher Donaldson
Production Designer
Matthew Davies
Music

Mychael Danna
Sound
Bernhard Joest
Costume Designer
Debra Hanson

Production Companies
Serendipity Point
Films presents in association with Distant Horizon, Detalle, Egoli Tossell Film and Telefilm

Canada a Robert Lantos production
An Atom Egoyan film
With the participation of Northern Ontario Heritage Fund Corporation, Ontario Media Development Corporation, The Harold Greenberg Fund
Executive Producers
Mark Musselman
Anant Singh

Moises Cosio
Michael Porter
Jeff Sagansky
D. Matt Geller
Lawrence Guterman

Cast

Christopher Plummer
Zev Guttman
Bruno Ganz
Rudy Kurlander 1
Jürgen Prochnow

Rudy Kurlander 4
Heinz Lieven
Rudy Kurlander 2
Henry Czerny
Charles Guttman
Dean Norris
John Kurlander
Martin Landau
Max Zucker
James Cade
gun shop owner
Peter DaCunha
Tyler
Sofia Wells

Molly
Jane Spidell
Kristin Kurlander

In Colour
[1.85:1]
Part-subtitled

Distributor
Studiocanal Limited

US, present day. Zev Guttman, a 90-year-old German-American living in a care facility, shows signs of worsening dementia after the death of his wife. Following the instructions laid out for him in a letter by fellow resident Max Rosenbaum, Zev leaves the facility and travels to Cleveland. When he arrives, he buys a handgun and goes to a house looking for a man named Rudy Kurlander. The fellow German is surprised when Zev threatens him with the gun and accuses him of being at Auschwitz, since he was in fact stationed in North Africa. Max's letter reveals that Zev and Max are the only Auschwitz survivors who can recognize the 'Blockführer' who murdered their families and who escaped to America, where he changed his name from Otto Wallisch to Rudy Kurlander. A former Nazi-hunter who worked with Simon Wiesenthal, Max has sent Zev to find and kill

Kurlander. However, there are four possible candidates with that name. Zev meets the next at another seniors home but this man informs Zev that he was a homosexual prisoner at Auschwitz, not a Nazi. While waiting at the house of the third Kurlander, Zev is greeted by the man's son John, a sheriff who tells him his father passed away. John speaks approvingly of his father's lifelong devotion to the Nazis, but Zev realises the this Kurlander was too young to have been at Auschwitz. John confronts Zev but is fatally shot. At the home of the final Kurlander, Zev recognises his voice and forces him to confess that he was the 'Blockführer'. But Kurlander also identifies Zev as the real Otto Wallisch, the two men having escaped together. After killing Kurlander, Zev shoots himself. In the care home, Max watches a news report on the incident, having known Zev's identity all along.

Rock the Kasbah

USA 2015

Director: Barry Levinson

Reviewed by Violet Lucca

Now available in feature-film form: that middle-aged saddy who relentlessly hits on younger women sitting at the other end of the bar. Wrapped in thick layers of self-pity, a shopworn sense of sassiness, dated pop music references and jokes that never quite land, *Rock the Kasbah* is as fun and illuminating as listening to one of That Guy's boasts. Thrown in for good measure is the 'based on a true story' story of Setara Hussainzada, the first woman to perform on *Afghan Star* (Afghanistan's version of *Pop Idol*), which gives our antihero Richie Lanz (Bill Murray) some new surroundings to mope around in and a little shape to his misadventures. A struggling talent manager/agent operating out of a rundown LA motel, Richie agrees to take Ronnie (Zooey Deschanel), his most promising act (who doubles as his secretary), to Afghanistan for a USO tour. She abandons him on the first night there – and steals his wallet and passport – which forces him to run ammo to a Pashtun warlord in order to earn some extra cash and an expedited visa... It also leads him to the warlord's beautiful, talented daughter Salima (Leem Lubany).

During his travels, Richie befriends Riza (Arian Moayed) a disco-loving cabbie who doubles as his translator, and Merci (Kate Hudson), a prostitute who alternately functions as a sex object and his moral compass. (She's also ostensibly his love interest, but Murray and Hudson can't conjure any chemistry, which turns what ought to be playful teasing into dreary 'no, you shut up' sniping.) Merci first catches Richie's eye while wearing glittery bindis and stilettos, which is a nice summary of the film's overall cultural sensitivity: Salima, Riza and the rest of the Afghan characters (and, of course, the ongoing international and intra-national conflicts) are drawn in the broadest of strokes, and relegated to the background when their problems aren't being used to advance Richie's spiritual growth. As Havana Marking's 2009 documentary *Afghan Star* showed, Hussainzada received death threats and was eventually forced to move to Germany. While it's not light comedy material, its potential is far greater than a film culminating in a trite big speech that includes the soulless line: "I made a few bucks, I nailed a couple of hot publicists, but I also gave up a daughter I love..."

Other Americans, representatives of the war industry, are so stupid it's almost an insult to Afghanistan that they're making out so well there. Nick (Danny McBride) and Jake (Scott Caan) are the pair of frat-boy arms dealers who broker Richie's gun run and, in their overly long scenes, fail to achieve any of the comic timing they've previously shown (or general acting skill, for that matter). Bombay Brian (Bruce Willis), a mercenary who's shopping around his memoirs, also fails to be anything other than a big dumb strong guy who pops up every once in a while to menace Richie.

In better hands, this could've been a truly subversive comedy dealing with America's ongoing failures of nation-building and regional hegemony. (This is set during the first war in Afghanistan, which is perhaps why it goes so heavy on the hope.) It's odd to think that Mitch Glazer, co-writer of the 1979 cult classic

Speed Sisters

USA/Palestine/Qatar/Denmark/United Kingdom 2015
Director: Amber Fares

Reviewed by Lisa Mullen

Amber Fares wasn't short of material when she came to make this film about a team of female racing drivers in Palestine. Political issues jostle her at every turn: the asymmetry of the Israel-Palestine conflict; the agency of women in male-dominated societies; the economic implications of blockades and occupation; the impact of the press and media on the integrity of sport. When they race, the 'Speed Sisters' compete in time trials in which they must negotiate a series of tightly packed obstacles, set up in a very small space; their drifts, turns and wheel-screaming slaloms work as a metaphor, both for the drivers' fraught and enclosed lives and for Fares's frantic directorial manoeuvring.

There are five women in the team. The leader and manager is Maysoon, a well-dressed boutique owner who hides a keen business sense beneath a sweetly smiling face. Mona is the veteran of the team, more reserved than the others but seemingly addicted to the adrenaline rush of the sport. Noor is the youngest; the daughter of a wealthy family, she lives in a big house and has a pass that gets her through the Israel-Palestine border – but she seems incapable of remembering the courses for each race, and is frequently disqualified. The two hot contenders for the female championship are Marah, who lives in a refugee camp and gets by on sheer talent, grit and optimism; and Betty, her polar opposite – glamorous, media-savvy and the Mexican-born scion of a racing-mad family.

It's immediately clear that, in the battle between Marah and Betty, Marah is the deserving underdog, especially when it begins to look as though Betty is getting all the breaks from the man who runs the local racing scene. A more ruthless filmmaker might have gone in for the kill here, lining Betty up as the pantomime villain of the piece. But while we are given plenty of pointers about Marah's patient humility and Betty's self-regarding vanity, Fares can't quite bring herself to commit to such monochrome morality and instead invites us to feel sympathy for all the women on the team. At one point



Rallying call: Betty Saadeh

Betty approaches a group of twitchy Israeli soldiers, apparently confident in the power of her pretty face and blonde hair to deflect any aggression; when she gets a tear-gas canister in the small of her back for her trouble, the fear, pain and frustration she feels cut through our reservations about her sillier tendencies.

In one of the most touching sequences, Marah is taken by Noor to see the sea for the first time in her life, and is so enchanted that she dives in, fully clothed. "Imagine if you could see this every day!" she breathes as she gazes at the horizon. What Fares's film manages to do is to take us the other way across the cultural barrier, to get a look at the granular reality that Marah really does see every day: not the dramatic attacks and outrages that make the global news, but the small and personal triumphs and disasters. If, at times, the film seems too crammed with storylines and incidents, it nevertheless manages to be a fascinating tribute to the indomitability of youth and aspiration. Any ambitious young person anywhere will face problems, Fares seems to say. It's just that, in Palestine, there are a lot more bumps in the road. 🇵🇸



The life phlegmatic: Bill Murray

Mr Mike's Mondo Video, a true masterpiece of rude, juvenile humour, is simply applying the same tired midlife-crisis formula and ethnic stereotypes to a setting that's ripe for commentary – or at least a little ribbing. 🇵🇸

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Jacob Pechenik
Bill Block
Ethan Smith
Steve Bing
Mitch Glazer
Written by
Mitch Glazer
Director of Photography
Sean Bobbitt
Edited by
Aaron Yanes
David Moritz
Production Designer
Niels Sejer
Music
Marcelo Zarvos
Production Sound Mixer
Chris Munro
Costume Designer
Deborah L. Scott

production
A film by Barry Levinson
Executive Producers
Tom Ortenberg
Peter Lawson
Iakovos Petsenikakis
Iakovina
Petsenikakina
Sasha Shapiro
Anton Lessine
Brian Grazer
Tom Freston
Marsha Swinton

Cast
Bill Murray
Richie Lanz
Kate Hudson
Merci
Zoey Deschanel
Romie
Danny McBride
Nick
Scott Caan
Jake
Leem Lubany
Salima
Arian Moayed
Riza

Bruce Willis
Bombay Brian
Taylor Kinney
Private Barnes
Glenn Fleshler
army warrant officer
Beejan Land
Daoud Sididi
Sameer Ali Khan
Azam Ghoul
Fahim Fazli
Tariq
Jonas Khan
Nizar
Sarah Baker
Maureen

Dolby Digital
In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
Sony Pictures
Releasing UK

©Kasbah, LLC
Production Companies
Venture FORTH and
QED International
Present a Shangri-La
Entertainment

Los Angeles, the recent past. Ronnie sings in a nightclub, drawing the attention of a USO scout. Her agent and boss Richie agrees to take her to Kandahar Province, Afghanistan, for a tour. When they arrive, their luggage is lost. Ronnie runs away, taking Richie's passport and wallet. Richie agrees to take guns and ammunition to a Pashtun warlord in exchange for money and an expedited visa. Richie eats dinner with the warlord and discovers that his daughter Salima is an excellent singer. Richie takes Salima to Kabul to audition for the talent show 'Afghan Star'. She's an instant hit but her performance shames her family. She goes into hiding. Discovering that the bullets he gave to Salima's father don't work, Richie talks a mercenary into helping to defend the village against an opposing militia. Salima performs on 'Afghan Star' with her father's blessing and wins the show.

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Amber Fares
Avi Goldstein
Jessica Devaney
Story Advisor
Jessica Devaney
Directors of Photography
Amber Fares
Lucy Martens
Edited by
Rabab Haj Yahya
Race Sound Recordists
Anan Ksym
Fadi Mabjish

©Speed Sisters LLC
Production Companies
A SocDoc Studios
production
Supported by
Sundance Institute,
Doha Film Institute
In association with
Chicken & Egg
Pictures, Minerva

Productions,
Whitewater Films
Supported by a
grant from the
Sundance Institute
Documentary
Film Program
Recipient of a
post-production
grant from the Doha
Film Institute
With funding from
International
Media Support
Recipient of Puma
Catalyst Award
in partnership
with BRITDOC
With additional
support from
Arthur B. Schultz
Foundation, British
Consulate General
Jerusalem, Ray of
Light Foundation
Fiscal sponsor:
Women Make
Movies, Inc.

In Colour
[1.78:1]
Subtitles

Distributor
Dogwoof

Palestine, present day. A documentary following the Speed Sisters, a female racing team, through two seasons of competition. As the only female drivers in Palestine, they compete not only against the men but against each other, with two drivers in particular, Marah and Betty, vying for the title of female champion. The women's backgrounds are very different: down-to-earth Marah lives in the refugee camp and her parents make huge sacrifices to fund her sport; Betty, originally from Mexico, works at the embassy, comes from a family of racing drivers, and uses her glamorous looks to monopolise the media limelight. The other team members are Noor, Mona and team manager Maysoon. The film interweaves race footage with snapshots of the women's lives and the difficulties they face from Israeli checkpoints, curfews and travel restrictions: at one point Betty is hit by a tear-gas canister as they try to train on wasteland next to a military base. It is Betty, though, who seems to find favour with the Palestinian racing authorities, and a series of controversial decisions mean that she nearly steals the championship from Marah; however, Marah's times cannot be beaten, and she is crowned champion.

Survival Instinct

United Kingdom 2014
Director: Steve Lawson
Certificate 15 75m 16s




The freak district: Helen Crevel

Reviewed by Trevor Johnston

In the teaser opening of *Survival Instinct*, a young woman in a white dress runs through the woods, seemingly in fear of her life, whereupon the caption "Three hours earlier..." sets up the movie proper. More female-in-peril clichés ahead then, though it turns out that this micro-budget thriller has more to offer, not least an affirmation that with no little resourcefulness it's indeed possible to knock together an effective narrative from two cars, four actors and a stretch of wooded country road. Writer, producer, director and cameraman Steve Lawson evidently had scant cash at his disposal, but

he still ratchets up a fair modicum of tension in what plays out like the modern equivalent of the B-movie programmers the British film industry was turning out 50 or 60 years ago.

He's not one for fancy dialogue, but the rudimentary script gets the job done, ensuring that paths cross on a deserted corner of the Peak District. Car trouble halts the progress of concert violinist Stacey on her way to a country wedding with the male friend who is evidently carrying a torch for her, while nearby a chest-beating father is trying to inculcate the joys of deer-hunting into his not-terribly-keen teenage son. Clearly, there's something sinister in alpha-male Andrew Coughlan's insistence that his boy prove his manhood by pulling the trigger on a young doe. Hence, when a stray bullet leaves Helen Crevel's girl-next-door Stacey suddenly fending for herself, the story gains traction because the hardened ex-con dad must dispose of any and all witnesses rather than face further jail time. While this is neither terribly complex nor original, it's in the nuts-and-bolts of the pursuit that the film is at its best, working out a resourceful bit of cat-and-mouse in and around Stacey's stricken Land Rover. This not only plays on the in-built anxiety of losing your bearings when one bit of woodland looks pretty much like another, but also shows how simple intercutting can really pay dividends when you get the timing just right.

That said, the largely sensible heroine is guilty of intermittent, uncharacteristic stupidity, which rather lets the side down, while the script's lengthy backstory monologue exposes rough-hewn Coughlan's acting limitations. To be fair, the film is at least trying to engage with notions of masculinity and the self-loathing behind his character's hysterically homophobic machismo, but there's not really the space within the tight thriller narrative nor the wherewithal in personnel to do such ambitions justice. Moreover, while the thrill of the chase is suitably tense while it lasts, Lawson is understandably up against it when trying to construct climactic surprises with small cast numbers to call on. It's no shame that matters resolve themselves exactly as you'd expect, when the film has to some extent exceeded expectations engendered by its overfamiliar opening salvo. Still, it's hard not to feel that its fascination with the roots of male violence would surely have been better flagged up by the discarded shooting title *Rite of Passage*. 

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Steve Lawson
Screenplay
Steve Lawson
Photographed by
Steve Lawson
Music
Alex Young

©Creativ Studios Ltd
Production Company
A Creativ Studios

production of a
Steve Lawson film

Cast
Helen Crevel
Stacey
Jay Sutherland
Thom
Andrew Coughlan
Weaver
Sam Smith
Rex

Isabella Nash
Susan
Glenn Salvage
Mike

In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
Film Volt Ltd

The Peak District, present day. Weaver, a macho ex-con, is teaching his teenage son Rex to hunt deer, but the boy proves unwilling to pull the trigger. Meanwhile concert violinist Stacey is being driven by her friend Thom to a country wedding when his car overheats and breaks down on a wooded road. While Stacey heads to get coolant from a garage, Thom catches a stray bullet when Weaver and his son argue over who'll finish off a wounded doe. Finding the garage closed, Stacey, her mobile out of battery, returns to find Thom missing. Weaver, who now has Thom's body in his car, pretends to be a good Samaritan, before trapping Stacey at gunpoint, telling her how being abused in a Catholic boys' home turned him into a violent homophobe who was jailed for attacking his other son. Weaver's pistol is unloaded, however, so Stacey flees, taking her valuable violin and losing her pursuer in the woods, then filling a carton of water in a stream to take back to the car. Weaver returns, so Stacey runs for it again, injuring him with a spiked 'no trespassing' sign; by nightfall she makes it to an unmanned warehouse. Weaver, who has followed, puts in motion a plan to flush her out and then have Rex kill her. However, a revived Thom saves the day, only for Weaver to turn the tables when Stacey returns for her violin. Rex ends the standoff by killing his father, and Stacey embraces the dying Thom.

Victoria

Germany 2015
Director: Sebastian Schipper
Certificate 15 138m 25s

See Feature
on page 38

Reviewed by Lisa Mullen

Sebastian Schipper's low-budget drama about a reckless young girl's excursion into the world of crime would be an ordinary enough affair were it not for the astonishing fact that he and cinematographer Sturla Brandth Grøvlen shot the whole 138 minutes in a single take, roaming the streets of Berlin to encompass 22 different locations en route. Bolstered by an atmospheric score by Nils Frahm and masterful performances by its young leads, who improvised most of the dialogue while carefully hitting their precisely orchestrated cues, the result is a lively and engrossing exercise in creative swagger.

The single-take gimmick has been alluring for many directors: Hitchcock used the technique to suffocating effect in 1948's *Rope*; Alejandro Iñárritu's 2014 *Birdman* relentlessly unspooled a man's life into a one-take, slow-motion meltdown. The effect is always uncomfortable. Denied the punctuation of the cut, the audience never has space to breathe; yet replacing the soothing banality of the shot/reverse-shot structure with a piece of showy technique means it's harder for us to feel completely immersed in the action. Of course, before digital, one-take films were always an illusion, and even Schipper's meticulously executed film is apparently a hybrid of three different run-throughs.

The joins, if there are any, are invisible as we descend headlong into the nightmare that overtakes Victoria (Laia Costa) when she leaves a nightclub in the early hours and falls in with a passing group of drunken lads out to make trouble. One of them, Sonne (Frederick Lau), takes a particular shine to Victoria, though they can only communicate in broken English since she is Spanish and he is German. But their increasingly supercharged connection turns dangerous when he drags her into an armed robbery that he and his mates have been coerced into carrying out. Our bafflement at her choices (naive? self-destructive?) is only increased by the unwavering gaze of the camera: despite the fact that she never leaves our sight, Victoria's motives remain opaque.

It's at this point, about halfway through, that the film makes a lurching turn from hipsterish whimsy into high-stakes heist thriller – not a transition that most films would survive, and this one does so only by the skin of its teeth. The one-take conceit is both the cause of, and the solution to, Schipper's problem here: a conventional structure would have allowed him to compress the action and balance the film's storylines more convincingly, but he is hampered by the strict temporal unity he has imposed on himself. Yet because of the sense of ineluctable propulsion created by Grøvlen's complex camerawork, which ducks and weaves through the shadows of a long, drunken night, the film makes you want to follow where it leads, even when the plot disregards the most basic requirements of plausibility.

The performances help enormously. Costa is convincing as the lonely outsider who takes a crazy punt on a total stranger and uses the danger of it to drown out her sense of failure and ennui. Lau is equally good as the slippery charmer whose easy lies come bubbling up

Welcome to Me

USA/Canada 2014
Director: Shira Piven

Reviewed by Nick Pinkerton

Have you ever yearned to see Chaplin's Tramp wrestle really and truly with the problem of his poverty? To see Keaton overcome his anhedonia? For Jerry Lewis's 'Kid' to solve his arrested development? If so, well, maybe *Welcome to Me* is the movie for you.

Shira Piven's film is a vehicle for Kristen Wiig, a more than able comedienne who first came to prominence on *Saturday Night Live* between 2006 and 2012. Put briefly, Wiig specialised in playing a bevy of outlandish, socially maladroit, perpetually spooked weirdos, and she played them exceedingly well. There was no need for the strangeness of these characters to be explained – we would almost resent it – and no threat of explanation, for the run-and-gun sketch-comedy format precluded the possibility of backstory. Since leaving *SNL*, Wiig has transitioned into a film career that encompasses low comedy and Sundance indies, and if I'm tempted to refer to her origins when talking about *Welcome to Me* it's because the film has something very much like a sketch premise at its centre – a diaristic talk show that acts as a stage for its host, Wiig's Alice Klieg, to air 20-year-old grievances, practise her overly mannered version of TV-host body language and indulge a cracked idea of what constitutes entertainment.

It's a promising enough conceit for a sketch, but the problem with *Welcome to Me* (the script is attributed to Eliot Laurence) is that it takes this sketch premise and laboriously builds an entire contextualising framework around it. It explains Wiig's typical kook character and situates her in the real world – and this process of explaining ruins the joke. Alice's kook has been multiply diagnosed through her adult life – alternately 'manic depressive' or 'borderline personality disorder'. The show is what it is because Alice, a newly minted lottery multimillionaire who can pay handsomely for every minute of airtime, is working without a net and without the interference of a producer. Almost everything that follows has been done before, and with far more sense of fun, by *Weird Al*'s *UHF* (1989).

To swing something like what *Welcome to Me* attempts would require a very precarious balance of pathos and absurdity, and you can't expect that from filmmakers who, post-*Fight Club*, have the temerity to use the Pixies' 'Where Is My Mind?' on the soundtrack.



It happened one night: Laia Costa

from an anxious awareness of his lack of money, education and status. It's one of the film's more subtle strokes of genius to place a language barrier between Victoria and her new German friends; she is left out of crucial conversations which the audience, with the benefit of subtitles, understand, emphasising not only Victoria's alienation but her vulnerability. And it's these gaps and glitches in verbal understanding that make the film's visual seamlessness even more dangerously seductive.

Schipper doesn't let Victoria off the hook, however: if she has been seduced by the dream of her own recklessness, she wakes up to discover a hard kernel of ruthless survivalism within herself. Her moral decline is laid out in no uncertain terms: at one point she and Sonne

kidnap a baby as a hostage, and the sharply realised terror and anguish of the child's parents make it clear how far Victoria has fallen. This rock-bottom moment contrasts with the cartoonish villainy of the unconvincing gangster (André Hennicke) who has masterminded the heist: the point seems to be that Victoria has discovered how alarmingly frictionless the slide can be from bored drifter to murderous scumbag.

Such tonal wavering is the main weakness of a film that otherwise simply bulldozes you with its ambition and commitment. Schipper and his cast have managed to turn a gimmick into a surprisingly subtle portrait of a millennial generation overwhelmed by its own unstoppable momentum. Ⓢ

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Jan Dressler
Sebastian Schipper
Producers
Anatol Nitschke
Catherine Baikousis
David Keitsch
Story
Sebastian Schipper
Olivia Neergaard-

Holm
Eike Frederik Schulz
Director of Photography
Sturla Brandth
Grøvlen
Art Director
Uli Friedrichs
Music
Nils Frahm

Sound Mixer
Magnus Pflüger
Costume Designer
Stefanie Jauss

©MonkeyBoy
Produktion
Production Companies
A MonkeyBoy

production
in co-production
with Deutschfilm
and Radicalmedia,
WDR and Arte

Cast
André M. Hennicke
Andi

Max Mauff
Fuss
Burak Yigit
Blinker
Franz Rogowski
Boxer
Frederick Lau
Sonne
Laia Costa
Victoria

In Colour
[2.35:1]
Subtitles

Distributor
Curzon Film World

Germany, present day. Victoria, a Spanish girl who has only recently moved to Berlin, is alone in the city, so when she leaves a nightclub early one morning she allows herself to be chatted up by Sonne, a young Berliner, and his friends Fuss, Blinker and Boxer. Together they steal alcohol from a local shop and the group break into an apartment building to smoke dope on the roof. Victoria invites Sonne to come with her to the café where she works. There, the pair become close; she reveals that she is a would-be concert pianist still bruised by her failure to make the grade. Their conversation is interrupted by the arrival of the others: they have been called to a meeting with local

gangster Andi, to whom Boxer owes a favour. Since Fuss is in a drunken stupor, Victoria agrees to go with them to make up the required number of people. Andi violently coerces them into carrying out an armed bank heist, with Victoria driving the getaway car. At first they seem to get away with it, but the police track them down and Boxer and Blinker are shot in a gunfight. Victoria and Sonne hold a young couple hostage in their apartment and use their baby as part of a disguise to exit the building unchallenged by police. They check into a hotel but Sonne has serious gunshot wounds. When he dies, Victoria is heartbroken but realises that her only option is to take the money and run.



Rich pickings: Kristen Wiig

➔ The self-obsession that Alice is called on to atone for is actually bolstered by the movie's own narrative priorities; it has little time for any of its supplementary characters except in so far as they relate to Alice – a questionable approach in any case, and unforgivable when you're squandering the combined talents of Joan Cusack and Jennifer Jason Leigh.

While ostensibly dealing in a woman's experience of mental illness, *Welcome to Me* is satisfied to stay on the safe surface of behavioural eccentricity, and when placed next to, say, the confessional comedy of Maria Bamford or the short films of Super-8 diarist Anne Charlotte Robertson, this imposture disappears. There is to be sure a damning satire to be made on the fetishisation and commodification of the 'folk art' of the mentally ill, à la Daniel Johnston, but it isn't this profoundly miscalculated mess, which pretends an actual interest in schizoid behaviour only to reduce it to tittery, *awk*-ward shtick. Ⓢ

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

Jessica Elbaum
Kristen Wiig
Aaron L. Gilbert

Marina Grasic

Will Ferrell

Adam McKay

Written by

Eliot Laurence

Director of

Photography

Eric Edwards

Editors

Josh Salzberg

Kevin Tent

Production

Designer

Clayton Hartley

Music

David Robbins

Sound Mixer

Robert Sharman

Costume Designer

Susan Matheson

©Welcome to

Me, LLC.

Production

Companies

Cargo Entertainment

presents a Bron

Studios/Gary

Sanchez production

in association with

Media House Capital

Executive

Producers

Keith Kjarval

Jeff Rice

Bead Grenier

Clayton Smith

Robyn Wholey

Burton Richie

John Raymonds

Cast

Kristen Wiig

Alice Klieg

Wes Bentley

Gabe Ruskin

Linda Cardellini

Gina Selway

Joan Cusack

Dawn Hurlay

Loretta Devine

Barb Vaughn

Jennifer Jason

Leigh

Deb Moseley

Thomas Mann

Rainer Ybarra

James Marsden

Rich Ruskin

Tim Robbins

Dr Daryl Moffet

Alan Tudyk

Ted Thuerber

Colour by

Fotokern

[L85:1]

Distributor

Vertigo Films

Zoolander 2

USA 2016

Director: Ben Stiller

Certificate 12A 101m 47s

Reviewed by Henry K. Miller

There is a curious double-layered unfunniness about *Zoolander 2*: it's not just that its jokes about two people from the turn of the century not understanding social media are unfunny; it's also that these jokes about being past it are themselves past it. Mind you, in theory, the first *Zoolander*'s very silly joke about the files being "in the computer" ought not to have worked at all, and yet it did – and does – resoundingly. As with *Anchorman 2* (2013), another long-delayed, much-hyped sequel from what used to be called the Frat Pack, the improvisatory spark has gone, and no number of celebrity cameos can provide a substitute. The outcome is a slightly melancholy affair for anyone with fond memories of the Ben Stiller-Owen Wilson double act of yore, the melancholy being compounded by the film's reliance on lacklustre callbacks to, or even borderline copies of, the first film's best scenes. Oddly enough, it's *Anchorman* star Will Ferrell, a virtual unknown at the time of the original, who provides this one with what pep it possesses, largely by yelling his head off.

There is a lot of plot to get through: models Derek (Stiller) and Hansel (Wilson) are brought out of retirement by designer Alexanya Atoz (Kristen Wiig, channelling the gendarme from *'Allo 'Allo*) and flown to Rome, where, as they discover, Derek's estranged son Derek Jr also happens to be living. Their paths cross with Penélope Cruz's catsuited Interpol agent ("fashion police") Valentina Valencia, who is investigating the deaths of various pop stars, most recently Justin Bieber, all of whom took a Zoolander-style selfie moments before tapping out. Valentina soon deduces that some sort of game is afoot, and as it turns out the whole concatenation of events is the work of the first film's villain, Mugatu (Ferrell), operating from an island prison somewhere in the Tyrrhenian. His plan is to lure in the fashion elite with the promise of eternal youth and then kill them all. Within Mugatu's conspiracy, Derek Jr is the descendant of Steve, gooseberry in the Garden



Trends with benefits: Ben Stiller

of Eden, and incarnation of the Fountain of Youth; Bieber and other pop stars are his guardians – but all this may be nonsense.

Part of the pleasure of the original *Zoolander*'s cameos was their randomness, "cool dude" Billy Zane being the ultimate example. Now Zane has a semi-significant role, fruitlessly embellishing a throwaway joke from 15 years ago. Some of the big-name cameos have been extensively publicised in advance, even generating controversy in the case of Benedict Cumberbatch's non-binary, non-funny character All, lessening their impact. Others, such as Anna Wintour and Tommy Hilfiger, simply flop. The first film was amusingly indifferent to its supposed object of supposed satire, the fashion business; the involvement of some of its major players in the sequel doesn't add a single laugh. Not a few of the handful of laughs we do get come courtesy of Kyle Mooney's hipster designer Don Atari, who relentlessly mocks the leads, as if punishing Stiller and Wilson for making such a disappointing film. Ⓢ

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

Ben Stiller

Stuart Cornfeld

Scott Rudin

Clayton Townsend

Jeff Mann

Written by

Justin Theroux

Ben Stiller

John Hamburg

Nicholas Stoller

Based on characters

created by Drake

Sather, Ben Stiller

Director of

Photography

Dan Mindel

Edited by

Greg Hayden

Production Designer

Jeff Mann

Music

Theodore Shapiro

Re-recording Mixers

Skip Lievsay

Craig Henighan

Costume Designer

Leesa Evans

©Paramount Pictures

Corporation

Production

Companies

Paramount Pictures

presents a Red

Hour/Scott Rudin

production

A Ben Stiller film

Cast

Ben Stiller

Derek Zoolander

Owen Wilson

Hansel

Dan Mindel

Will Ferrell

Jacobim Mugatu

Penélope Cruz

Valentina Valencia

Kristen Wiig

Alexanya Atoz

Fred Armisen

VIP

Kyle Mooney

Don Atari

Milla Jovovich

Katinka

Christine Taylor

Matilda Jeffries

Justin Theroux

evil DJ

Nathan Lee Graham

Todd

Cyrus Arnold

Derek Jr

Billy Zane

himself

Jon Daly

Agent Filippo

Sting

himself

Benedict

Cumberbatch

All

Dolby Digital

In Colour

[2.35:1]

Distributor

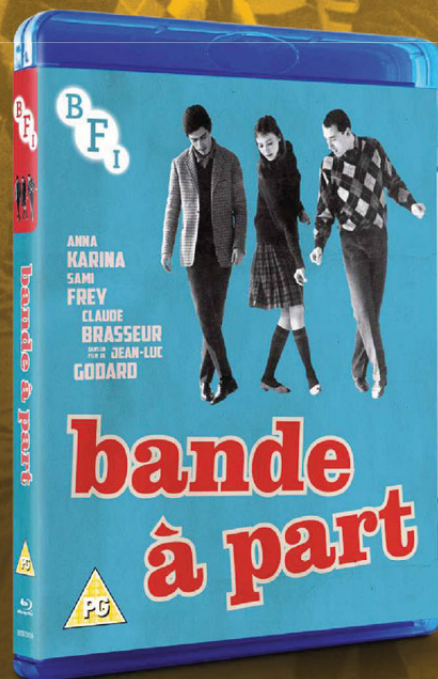
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Fifteen years after the collapse of the Derek Zoolander Center for Kids Who Can't Read Good, in which Zoolander's wife Matilda died, both Derek and Hansel have retired from modelling and live in seclusion. Billy Zane persuades them to travel to Rome to launch a new collection by Alexanya Atoz, but once there they are humiliated as has-beens. Zoolander is about to leave when he is asked by Interpol agent Valentina Valencia to help solve the murders of half a dozen pop stars, all of whom took Zoolander-style selfies before dying. When it transpires that Zoolander's estranged son Derek Jr is also in Rome, Valentina suspects foul play. Derek tries and fails to reconnect with his son, in the process discovering that all is not what it seems at his school, which turns out to be run by fallen fashion mogul Jacobim Mugatu, operating from an island prison. Mugatu escapes from prison, assembles the top names in fashion, apparently to drink Derek Jr's life-giving blood, but in reality to kill them all. Alexanya is revealed to be Katinka, Mugatu's sidekick. Mugatu's scheme is foiled by the combined efforts of Zoolander, Derek Jr, Valentina, Hansel and Hansel's long-lost father Sting. The ghost of Matilda gives Derek permission to marry Valentina.



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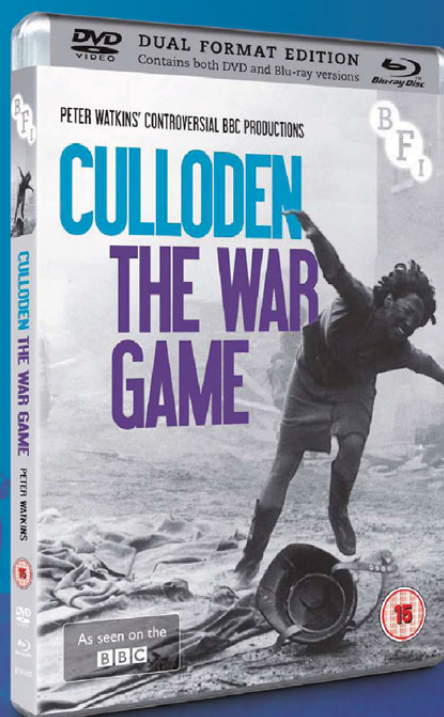
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Warrior woman: Hsu Feng as Miss Yang in *A Touch of Zen*

ZEN AND THE ART OF KING HU

Just as martial-arts movies were being dismissed by serious critics, one Taiwanese film showed *wuxia* to be a source of wonderment

A TOUCH OF ZEN

King Hu; Taiwan 1970; Eureka/Masters of Cinema/Region B Blu-ray; Certificate 12; 180 minutes; 2.35:1; Features: 'King Hu 1932-1997' documentary (47 minutes), video essay by David Cairns, selected scene commentary by Tony Rayns, booklet including a 1975 interview with King Hu by Tony Rayns, short story on which film is based, King Hu's director statement from Cannes film festival

Reviewed by Anne Billson

For *wuxia* virgins who may have been left less than impressed by the impenetrability of Hou Hsiao-Hsien's *The Assassin*, help is at hand. Masters of Cinema follows up its release of King Hu's *Dragon Inn* (1967) with a beautifully restored version of that same director's most celebrated film, a three-hour Taiwanese epic that proves *wuxia* can incorporate a coherent plot, pulse-quickenng fight scenes, exquisite landscapes and a spiritual dimension – and still be a lot of fun. *A Touch of Zen* (1970),

in other words, is the complete package, one that should appeal not just to arthouse audiences but to lovers of martial-arts action.

King Hu's screenplay was inspired by one of Pu Songling's 'Strange Stories from a Chinese Studio', a 17th-century collection of mysterious and paranormal-tinged tales (also the source material for *A Chinese Ghost Story*, itself a remake of *The Enchanting Shadow* by King Hu's contemporary and friend Li Han-Hsiang). It was said also to have been conceived as a reaction to the James Bond movies, which troubled the filmmaker with their implication that secret agents were above the law.

Accordingly, *A Touch of Zen*'s villains are members of the Eastern Group, a Ming dynasty equivalent of the Gestapo, who use torture, persecution and summary execution to bolster the corrupt regime of the eunuch Wei. Prominent among the rebels and fugitives ranged against them is Miss Yang, daughter of a military commander whose attempts to expose the corruption at court have resulted in his death. She's played by the wonderfully fierce-looking Hsu Feng, who had a small role in *Dragon Inn* and would go on to take leading roles in King Hu's other martial-arts masterpieces of the 1970s.

Several other actors from *Dragon Inn* return, albeit in guises wildly different from their roles in the earlier film. Shih Jun, who played the cool swordsman able to catch a flying arrow in his chopsticks, is cast this time as Gu, an impoverished small-town artist and scribe. Gu lives in humble surroundings with his mother, who constantly berates him for his lack of ambition and inability to find a wife. In short, he's a nerd, but it's this very lack of ambition that makes him trustworthy.

It's through Gu's eyes that we watch the drama unfurl. When a stranger shows up at his painter's shop and starts asking questions about other newcomers in town, we and Gu are treated to the sort of Sergio Leone-type close-up that hints he might not be as amiable as he seems. Several of the newcomers, it turns out, have secret identities, none more so than the mysterious Miss Yang, who has taken up residence in the dilapidated fort next door to Gu and his mother. And that blind fortune-teller who's been feeling his way around town? He's not nearly as unsighted as he appears – in fact he's General Shih, one of Miss Yang's faithful retainers, played by Bai Ying, another of King Hu's regular actors, unrecognisable from his earlier role as *Dragon Inn*'s evil albino eunuch.

Hu takes his time in peeling away the layers, revealing unexpected new dimensions in a narrative that deepens as it goes on. What starts off as a leisurely domestic comedy of small-town life, with Gu's bumbling intercut with his mother's unabashed efforts to co-opt Miss Yang as a prospective daughter-in-law, veers briefly into romance, and thence into political intrigue. The first real action breaks out at around the one-hour mark, when Miss Yang is confronted by the stranger and proves – much to the viewer's delight – that she is more than capable of looking after herself. This scene also demonstrates that if Gu is the film's protagonist, he's certainly no action hero, though his knowledge of military history will come in useful later, when he helps the rebels compensate for their inferior numbers by turning the abandoned fort into a trap for their enemies. Miss Yang has no intention of setting up house with him but, in one of the film's most unexpected developments, she does leave him with a precious souvenir of their fleeting encounter.

An expository flashback also introduces us to Roy Chiao as the Abbot, whose own martial-arts skills, which he employs only in defence, prove vastly superior to those of the other characters. King Hu had already changed the face of fight scenes in *Come Drink with Me* (1966) and *Dragon Inn* by incorporating elements from Peking opera and filming the results as though they were dance. His fights are not ends in themselves but symbolic, stylised confrontations in natural surroundings, such as the iconic showdown in a bamboo forest, where the editing is stepped up (albeit never to the incoherent machine-gun pacing of some of today's action sequences) and where montage and rhythm, inserts of fluttering fabric and discreet use of trampolines are used to suggest rather than show the warriors swooping

It proves that wuxia can incorporate plot, exquisite landscapes and a spiritual dimension – and still be fun



Roy of light: Roy Chiao



The director King Hu

down from trees or leaping impossible heights.

There's almost a prototype games-playing structure to the story in the way the weaker villains are replaced by incrementally stronger bad guys until, finally, the heroes find themselves faced with a 'Final Boss' whose skills make even their hitherto impressive martial arts look like small potatoes. Gu and even Miss Yang and their earthly concerns fall by the wayside as the combat moves on to a higher plane, one where evil must be turned against itself in order for good to prevail, and where a wounded monk bleeds gold in a psychedelic climax that replaces the usual 'might is right' message of the action genre with a more transcendental conclusion.

A Touch of Zen's release history was patchier than for King Hu's preceding *wuxia* hits *Come Drink with Me* and *Dragon Inn*, partly due to its length. Its financiers insisted on releasing it first in two separate parts in 1969, then later re-edited it into a single two-hour feature. Neither strategy paid dividends, and it wasn't until 1975 that the three-hour director's cut received its world premiere at Cannes, where it was awarded a technical prize, helping to make it the first of King Hu's films to attract attention in the west. By this time, ironically, the genre the filmmaker had helped to reinvent had already moved on, fuelled by the international popularity of Bruce Lee and kung-fu films that were routinely dubbed, cut and retitled for grindhouse audiences. But *A Touch of Zen* was a reminder that the martial-arts genre, all but ignored by most serious critics in the 1970s, could be a rich source of wonderment.

The transfer on this Masters of Cinema release enables one to really appreciate Hua Hui-Ying's glorious cinematography for the first time since 1975; the spooky fort, in particular, looks fabulous. Extras include commentary on selected scenes by Tony Rayns, and a documentary and video essay by critic and filmmaker David Cairns. The booklet includes a statement by the director, a 1975 interview with him by Rayns, the full text of Pu Songling's *The Magnanimous Girl* (the short story that provided the inspiration for the film) and, most amusingly, an illustrated list of 'Characteristics of the Swordsman in King Hu's Films'. Now all we need is for King Hu's lesser-known masterpieces *The Fate of Lee Khan* (1974) and *The Valiant Ones* (1975) to receive the same treatment. **S**


New releases

BEYOND THE VALLEY OF THE DOLLS

Russ Meyer; USA 1970; Arrow/Region B Blu-ray; 109 minutes; 2.35:1; Features: six 20th Century Fox featurettes (2006), two screen tests (1969), theatrical trailers, commentary tracks by Roger Ebert and five members of the cast, stills gallery, booklet

Reviewed by Tony Rayns

It's hard to credit that when Russ Meyer's magnum opus opened in London in 1971, most reviewers (including the one in *Monthly Film Bulletin*) thought that its comedy was unintentional. Obviously they'd never seen anything else by Meyer and had no idea who scriptwriter Roger Ebert was, but still... the collective cluelessness reveals how parochial and blinkered British film culture was at the time. Audiences were somewhat smarter than the critics, and *Beyond the Valley of the Dolls* soon became a midnight-movie fixture in the schedules of The Electric on Portobello Road – where it was seen by Malcolm McLaren, John Lydon and Sid Vicious and persuaded them that Meyer and Ebert were the team to direct and write the Sex Pistols movie. Ebert recalls this episode in some detail in his splendidly candid commentary track, one of many elements here that make this Arrow release a real keeper.

Given studio resources and a decent budget, Meyer grabbed the opportunity to do what he'd been doing for a decade, but bigger and better. An all-girl rock trio, determined to make it in Los Angeles, is propelled to stardom by a transsexual manager; the collateral damage along the way includes a stolid old boyfriend, a slimy lawyer, a venal gigolo and a Nazi in hiding. It's deadpan-droll throughout (with at least as many highly quotable lines as *Rocky Horror*), cod-moralistic, carefully balanced between satire and melodrama, gratuitously focused on women with outsize breasts, and shot and edited with astonishing mastery. Much of Meyer's film language, as Ebert points out, is redolent of 'pure' silent cinema: to-the-point storytelling and earnestly expressive performances, plus montage sequences worthy of Slavko Vorkapich. Let's hope this release presages the rediscovery of Meyer's 



Rock follies: *Beyond the Valley of the Dolls*

New releases



second Fox film, *The Seven Minutes*.

Disc: An unimprovable hi-def transfer.

All the extras are ported over from a 2006 Fox DVD, and more watchable than most of their kind. Ebert's commentary is always interesting; an alternative commentary track by members of the cast is unlistenable.

CHAPLIN'S ESSANAY COMEDIES

Charlie Chaplin; USA 1915; Flicker Alley/Region

A/1 Blu-ray/DVD Dual Format; 405 minutes;

Features: two bonus films, booklet

Reviewed by Pamela Hutchinson

In 1914, Mack Sennett tried to persuade Charlie Chaplin to renew his contract at Keystone. Chaplin demurred, declaring that he had no need of the Keystone facilities when all he required to make a comedy was "a park, a policeman and a pretty girl". And so Chaplin turned his back on the 'fun factory' and signed with the Chicago-based Essanay outfit, for a head-turning \$1,250 a week and a frankly astonishing \$10,000 handshake.

Despite the generous financial rewards on offer at Essanay (which took some time to materialise), Chaplin was largely unimpressed with the bare-bones set-up. Still, he discovered a few great comic foils among the Essanay troupe, including the raw-boned, cross-eyed Ben Turpin. And while working at Essanay's San Francisco studio, Chaplin first met Edna Purviance, a beautiful, funny young actor who enlivens both his Essanay films and many later works too.

So the 14 films that Chaplin made at Essanay, which are collected in this new box-set after being restored by Lobster Films and Cineteca di Bologna, are something more than rough diamonds. Chaplin gleams, whatever the setting, though many camera set-ups and scenarios betray the fact that these movies were made in less than ideal circumstances. Or perhaps they were ideal – much here adheres to the classic 'park, policeman, pretty girl' model, after all. Chaplin's earliest films at the studio, free-for-all slapstick parties such as *His New Job* or *In the Park*, return to the barely controlled chaos of the Keystone mode, but with a central performance that elevates them to a kind of poetry.

Chaplin is magnetic, whether practising tiny bits of stage business such as flicking a single speck from a grubby jacket (*Work*), or bouncing around a gymnasium in ornate set-piece gags that anticipate the boxing scenes in 1931's *City Lights* (*The Champion*). The perfectionism of his stage training (best displayed in the theatre shtick of *A Night in the Show*) combines with his graceful movements and his way of spearing the camera lens with a winningly impish look to create an effect that is unmistakably cinematic.

As the films become more complex – see the elaborate comedy escapades in *The Bank* or *Shanghai'd* – Chaplin's character does too. There's romance in *A Jitney Elopement*, with Purviance's Iona Lott begging a flower-sniffing Chaplin to be her 'white knight'. There's a jolt of poignancy in *The Tramp*, which leaves Chaplin trudging heartbroken down a dusty lane, and cynicism in *Police*, which takes aim at the clergy in the form of a hypocritical preacher.

Just over a year after arriving at Essanay, Chaplin would trundle off to Mutual, where

he would make many of his finest shorts.

This was a period of escalated development for Chaplin, despite his misgivings, and the films collected here reveal a ferocious talent ablaze with creativity.

Disc: Crisp, bright restorations of all films, with orchestral scores as well as additional shorts *Triple Trouble*, an unofficial Essanay cash-in, and *Charlie Butts In*, assembled in the 1920s from unused takes of *A Night Out*.

DEEP RED

Dario Argento; Italy 1975; Arrow/Region B Blu-ray; 127/105

minutes; Certificate 18; 2.35:1; Features: director's cut

version, theatrical cut version, original soundtrack recording, audio commentaries, documentaries, trailers, booklet

Reviewed by Kim Newman

Made between his loose trilogy of animal-themed *gialli* (*The Bird with the Crystal Plumage*, *The Cat o' Nine Tails*, *Four Flies on Grey Velvet*) but before his supernatural-surreal horror diptych (*Suspiria*, *Inferno*), Dario Argento's *Deep Red* is a transitional work that offers not just a string of set-piece murders and a fiendishly cunning whodunnit but also a fantastical element, as a psychic's predictions and a series of offhand omens tie in with the killings. Note the seer (Macha Méril) reacting in horror just moments before the murderer breaks through her door, or the way bits of comic business relate to very unfunny horrific deaths. It also has the best ever use of the story trick of a protagonist glimpsing something at the scene of the first crime which nags at his memory throughout, until he realises the importance of what he saw; usually, as in *The Bird with the Crystal Plumage*, a second viewing reveals that the audience wasn't shown the vital clue, but here the face of the mystery killer is legitimately on screen at a key juncture and almost no first-time viewer will spot it.

Marcus Daly (David Hemmings), an English pianist in Rome, is alerted by a scream to the slaughter in an apartment just below his, and feels compelled to investigate the crime, in partnership with an oddly aggressive yet jittery journalist (Daria Nicolodi). The mystery and the murders proceed by disorientating narrative lurches, which depend on odd things such as tracking down a haunted house from a photograph in a book and finding a child's mural of murder under the plaster in a neglected room. Hemmings's presence in blinding white

trousers is a nod to *Blow-up*, a touchstone for *gialli*, but Argento extends his range of visual reference beyond the cinema: a key setting is a Roman square which is as unpopulated as any of Antonioni's eerie urban spaces and which also has a diner full of suspects arrayed after the manner of Edward Hopper's *Nighthawks*.

It's elegant and witty but also shocking and cruel. The contrived deaths involve bleeding bodies shoved through broken windows, scalding in the bath, teeth smashed against a mantelpiece, someone being dragged along behind a garbage truck and decapitation via necklace caught in a lift grille. Yet almost as memorable are odd frills such as the sudden appearance of a clockwork puppet and a disturbed little girl (Nicoletta Elmi) who is plainly going to grow up to be the next generation of psychopath.

The film marked Argento's first collaboration with Claudio Simonetti, whose jazzy, operatic score is highlighted on this release.

Disc: This isn't just a repackaging of the previous 2011 Arrow Blu-ray with the soundtrack album thrown in as a third disc, though it carries over all the extras from the earlier release. Besides new and improved transfers of the director's and the international cuts of the film, there's a new visual essay on Argento's early films from Michael Mackenzie. As is often the case with films that exist in two versions, both have their pluses and minuses – the director's cut has an Italian-language track and perhaps more comic bitplay with car seats than is helpful; the international cut has an English dub (which preserves Hemmings's voice) and a tighter narrative.

L'INHUMAINE

Marcel L'Herbier; France 1924; Flicker Alley/Region A

Blu-ray; 122 minutes; 1.33:1; Features: alternate scores by

Alloy Orchestra and Aidje Tafial, new documentaries about the film's original production and Tafial's score, booklet

Reviewed by Michael Atkinson

The infamous, long-sought mega-splash of *au courant* cinematic futurism, and one of silent cinema's most notorious follies, this remarkable oddball has never before been available on disc anywhere, and never on video at all outside France. Like all L'Herbier, it's essential viewing; the filmmaker was second only to Gance in his appetite for visual extremities and avant-garde style ideas.

He went one token over the line with this fantasia, in which an unlikely uber-femme (matronly opera chanteuse Georgette Leblanc, ex-muse to Maurice Maeterlinck) drives secret resurrection plots (using proto-television and 'magical science'), all of it on absurd meta-modern cut-out sets designed by Fernand Léger and Claude Autant-Lara.

L'Herbier himself thought the story asinine, all the better to construct a cardboard universe teetering on the brink of *amour fou*, technological revolution and frenzied subjectivity. More than any other movie, it exemplifies how what was eventually labelled French Impressionist Cinema straddled the canyon between narrative film and the experimental – at times *L'Inhumaine* looks like a fractured Man Ray concoction extrapolated out into



The man in the white suit: *L'Inhumaine*



ALMOST FAMOUS

Antonio Pietrangeli's critique of 60s sexual politics explores the tensions between shifting mores and macho traditions

I KNEW HER WELL

Antonio Pietrangeli: Italy 1965; Criterion Collection/Region A Blu-ray/Region 1 DVD; 115 minutes; 1.85:1; Features: interview with actor Stefania Sandrelli and film scholar Luca Barattini, archival footage of Sandrelli's audition, theatrical trailer, essay by author Alexander Stille

Reviewed by Nick Pinkerton

A runway model and a black-and-blue boxer who's just been handed a humiliating loss take a late-night walk together before catching the morning train. At a sponsored party for film-industry types, a middle-aged comedian dusts off an old shtick and almost tap dances his way to a coronary on top of a coffee table, a public audition as degradation ceremony. A one-time usherette waits in the wings of a vast cinema with her co-workers to see her screen debut in a pre-film featurette, but her big break turns to heartbreak.

There's no business like showbusiness in *I Knew Her Well*, a series of scenes from the life of Adriana (Stefania Sandrelli), a girl hailing from a dusty provincial hellhole who, by dint of her natural beauty and little more in the way of effort, makes her way to the lower echelons of fame in Rome: some modelling here, a bit of extra work there, and no lack of unwanted propositions, though the naturally randy Adriana might echo the defiant ethos of *Shampoo's* George Roundy: "I don't fuck anybody for money." In a fallen world, this amounts to a moral victory.

One of the greatest Italian films from a great period for Italian films, *I Knew Her Well* is also an ideal introduction to the cinema of Antonioni Pietrangeli, located somewhere at the intersection of neorealism, *commedia all'italiana* and modernism all'Antonioni. It also happens to be Pietrangeli's last finished feature; in the summer of 1968, aged 49, he died in a swimming accident in the sea near Gaeta during a shooting break on his *Come, quando, perché* (*How, When and with Whom*), which was subsequently completed by his friend Valerio Zurlini.

Robbed of what are often a director's most productive years, Pietrangeli was unable to cement his legacy, and even a little while ago it might have still been possible to speak of him as the proverbial unknown genius of post-war Italian cinema – though with subsequent retrospectives at the Austrian Film Museum and the Museum of Modern Art and now the Criterion coronation of *I Knew Her Well*, the secret may be getting out.

Rome-born Pietrangeli, a critic-turned-filmmaker, came up in the neorealist moment, a contributor to the influential journal *Cinema* along with Carlo Lizzani, Giuseppe De Santis and Luchino Visconti – Pietrangeli contributed to the scripts of Visconti's *Ossessione* (1943) and




Stars in her eyes: Stefania Sandrelli as Adriana in *I Knew Her Well*

La terra trema (1948). He made his directorial debut in 1953's *Il sole negli occhi* (*Empty Eyes*), in which Irene Galter plays a naive young woman from a rural backwater who arrives in Rome to work as a domestic. Pietrangeli, who was no green novice when he began to direct, seems to have come to cinema with his sensibility fully formed, and *Empty Eyes* introduces many of the same themes that he was still examining by the time of *I Knew Her Well*: it's an inquiry into contemporary Italian society, particularly interested in the changes wrought by the new mobility and mass migration to the cities, an uprooting that had effected a revolution in mating habits and introduced a moral licence both exhilarating and disorientating.

While the traditional order had been upended by the new consumer culture, old macho behavioural codes kept up as though nothing had happened, and Pietrangeli would repeatedly stretch this tension until it twanged. Domestic pressure-cooker *Nata di marzo* (*March's Child*, 1958) dissects the anatomy of a premature marriage (and subsequent divorce); ensemble comedy-drama *Adua e le compagne* (*Adua and Her Friends*, 1960) takes place in the immediate

aftermath of the passage of the 1958 Merlin Law, which closed the brothels of Italy, de jure robbing prostitutes of a living while they were still without a means to re-enter the 'proper' community; the sourly hilarious *La visita* (*The Visit*, 1964) looks at the era's new Lonely Hearts-style flirtation as a kind of business negotiation.

However, to frame Pietrangeli's filmmaking entirely in terms of social concerns or to pitch him as a proto-feminist risks making him sound like a messenger boy delivering then topical themes, while his artistry consists in attaching these themes to concrete, closely observed and up-to-the-minute contemporary environments. Care is taken to give even the briefest of scenes the unmistakable knocked-about crookedness of life itself, and you can't soon forget the office of Adriana's superannuated press agent, its walls papered with yellowed clippings; the morning after an all-night spree, parked in a convertible outside a zoo aviary; or the lonesome hush of an outdoor pool at night, from which the frantic motion of a dance floor is distantly visible.

A steady diet of empty-headed pop platters from the likes of Mina and Peppino di Capri provides a soundtrack to the manic-depressive ructions of Adriana's life – of which she, beset by advisers, 'well-wishers' and thirsty would-be benefactors, can only assert ownership through caprice. Appraised and abused and haggled over, her only self-defence is whim, from innocent bed-hopping to a final, irrevocable leap. Anything goes, and then everything does. 

Care is taken to give even the briefest of scenes the unmistakable knocked-about crookedness of life itself

New releases

➔ a dream epic. At others, it's an Erté design given preposterous life. Today, it looks like the starting pistol for the skylarking tradition taken up by Wes Anderson (and, in several ways, chaperoned by Jack Smith, Larry Jordan and the Kuchars) and glows with the beauty of the erstwhile avant-garde.

Disc: The new restoration, from the original nitrate negative, is gorgeous, and the 'history of' supplemental material is fascinating, however much more of it we may've wanted.

KISS OF THE SPIDER WOMAN

Hector Babenco; Brazil/USA 1985; Curzon Artificial Eye/Region 2 DVD; 118 minutes; Certificate 15; 1.85:1; Features: 'Tangled Web: Making Kiss of the Spider Woman' documentary, Manuel Puig featurette 'The Submissive Woman's Role', slide-show commentary 'Transition from Novel to Film', photo gallery

Reviewed by Kate Stables

Manuel Puig's postmodern prison novel, with its internalised web of screen fantasies and politics-vs-escapism dialogues, seemed an odd fit for Hector Babenco after the harrowing naturalism of his 1981 film *Pixote*. Even more surprising was William Hurt's casting as gay story-spinner Luis Molina. Fascinatingly, Hurt succeeded Burt Lancaster, whose keen and early interest in the role is preserved in a be-turbaned snapshot. The exhaustive – and slightly exhausting – extras documentary that traces the film's years of odyssey from script to screen is commendably frank about its rocky beginnings. Near impossible to finance, its shoot riven and stalled by creative clashes, it needed 14 months of editing before Hurt carried off the Best Actor award at Cannes, and it became the first independent film to receive a clutch of Oscar nominations (Hurt won Best Actor there too).

Thirty years on, it's hard to appreciate how groundbreaking it was in the way it mixed its Nazi propaganda film-within-a-film with the tough-and-tender drama of the prisoners' bond. But the bruised machismo of Raul Julia's fellow prisoner Valentin Arregui registers more strongly against Hurt's flamboyance with the passage of time. A landmark in queer cinema, as compassionate as it is daring.

Disc: The two-DVD version sent for review has a creditable transfer (the Nazi melodrama scenes have an intentional sepia softness). It comes laden with hefty extras – the 'making of' feature is not far off the length of the film itself.

PEDICAB DRIVER

Sammo Hung; Hong Kong 1989; Warner Archive/Region 0 DVD; 96 minutes; 1.85:1

Reviewed by Nick Pinkerton

Sammo Hung, the husky action star who bounces back like a beach ball when knocked down, has acted as fight choreographer on two of King Hu's genre-redefining *wuxia*, defined kung-fu comedy through the late 1970s and 80s alongside former Peking opera classmate Jackie Chan, and been an unlikely leading man on US television with CBS's *Martial Law*. He has, in short, led one of the most remarkable careers to emerge from the creative ferment of Hong Kong in the two decades before the 1997 handover – and if you had to choose one film that best exemplifies his abilities



Web transfer: *Kiss of the Spider Woman*

as an action star and director, *Pedicab Driver* would land on top of any respectable shortlist.

Set in rough-and-ready 1930s Macau, the movie revolves around a group of pedicab drivers played by Hung, Max Mok, Lowell Lo and Hoi Mang, introduced in a bare-knuckle labour dispute with coolie competitors and rarely afterwards given much breathing time between dust-ups.

Hung is as nimble behind the camera as he is in front of it, shifting tone between episodes of five-hanky melodrama (including a stern lecture against slut-shaming by Nina Li) and low comedy. He stages his introduction with a close-up of his ample, pumping haunches, and gives John Shum, as vile, gold-grill-wearing villain Master M, free licence to go big with pillow-talk lines such as, "I just had a huge shit and a piss in the bathtub."

This all amounts to a handsome setting for the film's precious stones, a series of knockdown, drag-out brawls, each with its own distinct tempo and identity and the same whip-smart cutting. The spoof-heavy intro, which cites the Stooges and *Star Wars*, is followed by a standalone duet with old-school Shaw Bros legend Lau Kar-Leung, then a tactical assault finale that ends with Sammo trading roundhouses with long-legged kickboxer Billy Chow. The complete package is the result of many lifetimes of precision training and a mad will to entertain that extends to a reckless disregard for personal safety – a gleeful personal best for Sammo, and for Hong Kong movies in the island's 'don't give a damn' heyday.

Disc: Warner Archive's manufactured-on-demand DVD-R, announced as part of a forthcoming trove of heretofore unavailable Golden Harvest titles, offers a surprisingly detailed HD transfer, as well as subtitles that at least occasionally uphold a long tradition of mangled grammar on HK imports.

PERIL EN LA DEMEURE

Michel Deville; France 1985; Gaumont/Multi-region Blu-ray; 101 minutes; 1.66:1; Features: interviews with Michel Deville and cast, interview with Richard Bohringer, trailer

Reviewed by David Thompson

The title *Péril en la demeure* comes from the phrase 'there's no peril in delay', but in English-speaking territories Michel Deville's film was renamed *Death in a French Garden*. This was a nod to the French distribution title of Peter Greenaway's *The Draughtsman's Contract* (1982), which became *Meurtre dans un jardin anglais* and was a film Deville greatly admired.

Deville is hardly a well-known director outside France (after a steady career, he is now retired), for although he is of the same generation as the New Wave – his first feature was released in 1958 – he has never been identified with that hallowed band of brothers. While his cinema tends towards the mainstream, using literary-based stories, familiar actors and high production values, it has always been distinctive in its wit and playfulness, and has generally been far more cerebral than gut-wrenching. Only three of his films have met with major success, the period sex-romp *Benjamin* (1968) with Catherine Deneuve and Pierre Clémenti, *Péril en la demeure* (1985) and *La Lectrice* (1988), in which Miou-Miou made a profession out of reading literature to a perverse range of clients.

Péril describes a world where no one says what they mean and their motivations remain tantalisingly opaque. While this could be an irritant for some viewers, it provides the material for a rather brilliant thriller, one largely based on the power of eroticism. A young guitar tutor (Christophe Malavoy) takes a job teaching the adolescent daughter of a bourgeois couple, and is immediately subject to a direct act of seduction by the mother (Nicole Garcia), while the father (Michel Piccoli) remains mysteriously aloof. Add in a highly eccentric neighbour (Anémone), who delights in discussing such topics as female pubic hair, and a distracted, soulful hitman (Richard Bohringer) and the screen is set for a very peculiar tale of adultery and murder. Deville makes it all work through his precise framing and editing – he excels in unexpected cuts on movements and close-ups – and a very refined use of classical music. And in *Péril*, there is a marked homage to the art of Balthus, especially in the posturing of the female characters.

All told, it would be hard to imagine a sensibility like Deville's operating in any other cultural context but France.

Disc: A fine transfer with good subtitles that bravely attempt – and it can only be an attempt – to translate a script full of wordplay and puns. The extras, which include an interview with an exceedingly grouchy Bohringer, are in French only.

THREE FILMS WITH GERARD PHILPE

UNE SI JOLIE PETITE PLAGE

Yves Allégret; France 1949; Pathé Restoration/Multi-region Blu-ray and DVD; 90 minutes; 1.37:1; Features: 'Au cinéma ce soir' episode on the film, interviews on Gérard Philipe and the film, newsreel, alternate ending, trailer

LES ORGUEILLEUX

Yves Allégret; France/Mexico 1953; Pathé Restoration/Multi-region Blu-ray and DVD; 104 minutes; Features: 'Au cinéma ce soir' episode on the film, interviews on Gérard Philipe and the film, trailer

LA FIEVRE MONTE A EL PAO

Luis Buñuel; France/Mexico 1959; Pathé Restoration/Multi-region Blu-ray/DVD; 100 minutes; Features: interviews on Gérard Philipe and the film, Charles Tesson on Luis Buñuel, trailer

Reviewed by David Thompson

With his early death from cancer at the age of 36 coinciding with the seismic arrival of the New Wave, the once much beloved French actor

Gérard Philipe was instantly condemned to be associated with the old guard, the 'tradition of quality' or *le cinéma de papa*. Truffaut famously hated his voice and said he would never work with him. But now that the critical dust has long settled, these restored versions of three of Philipe's most significant films reveal him to be a performer of considerable subtlety and depth.

At the beginning of his career, he was promoted as a kind of matinee idol in light, romantic fare on stage and screen. A leftwing idealist known for his generosity and lack of ego, he directed his success towards supporting groundbreaking performances of the classics in Jean Vilar's Théâtre National Populaire, while taking on darker, more substantial roles in the cinema.

The two films directed by Yves Allégret certainly had a great impact in their time. *Une si jolie petite plage* ('Such a Pretty Little Beach'), finds a mysterious young man arriving at a village on the north coast of France and taking up residence in the only hotel there. The constant rain (which had to be artificially supplied, as the production for once was dogged by good weather) and Henri Alekan's inky black-and-white photography propose this mordant tale as a *film noir français*, while the underlying despair strongly reflects the fashionable existentialism of the period. Details of Philipe's character emerge gradually (flashbacks are carefully avoided) to reveal that he spent a miserable youth in the town, and identifies strongly with a young boy – a war orphan – who is similarly treated shamefully by the locals. Allégret was obliged to add a preface and an afterword to explain that this depiction of war orphans was not representative, which is some indication of the power of the film on release.

Les Orgueilleux ('The Proud Ones') also had its tone softened – the producer inserted a final



Safety last: *Pedicab Driver*

romantic clinch between the two protagonists, shot in a Paris studio after location filming in Mexico had been completed. The origins lay in a story by Jean-Paul Sartre called *Typhus*, though that was set in a French colony in the Far East. Allégret and writer Jean Aurenche stripped out the politics and relocated the action to Mexico, where French bourgeoisie Michèle Morgan arrives in a port town with her seriously sick husband and finds herself stranded as typhoid breaks out all around. Philipe is a hopelessly alcoholic doctor who took to the bottle out of guilt for causing his wife's death in a catastrophic childbirth and never returned home. Gradually Morgan and Philipe find a passionate connection, but the film is most memorable for its depiction of the stifling heat and sickness. A long sequence in a hotel room where Morgan, dressed only in her slip and bra, attempts to cool herself with a fan and ice cubes was a major shock for an adolescent Martin Scorsese, for one.

Luis Buñuel was an adviser on *Les Orgueilleux* – he is supposedly in the cast too, but I failed to spot him – and struck up a friendship with Philipe. Various plans to work together (most significantly, an adaptation of Matthew Lewis's gothic novel *The Monk*) came to nought. But when Buñuel was offered the script of *La Fièvre monte à El Pao* ('Fever Mounts at El Pao'), the French actor agreed to take what was to be his last screen role. *Republic of Sin* (its English title), in truth one of the Spaniard's weaker films, was shot in Mexico but deals with a fictional prison island off South America. Philipe, briefly in control after the assassination of his governor boss, attempts to show humanity towards the many political prisoners there, but he is brought down by his own idealism. Clearly Buñuel hoped to make parallels with Francoist Spain, but there are only a few flashes of the angry young surrealist at work. The plot eventually becomes muddled, and clearly undue emphasis had to be placed on Maria Félix's rapacious widow and her doomed relationship with Philipe. A sad final bow for a fine actor, then, though of course Buñuel went on to greater things.

Disc: Very fine restorations in the welcome ongoing Pathé series. Excellent English subtitles on the films but not the extras – the new interviews are rather scrappily filmed and assembled; the archive material is of greater interest.

ROCCO AND HIS BROTHERS

Luchino Visconti: Italy 1960; Eureka/Masters of Cinema/Region B Blu-ray; Certificate 15; 177 minutes; 1.85:1; Features: documentaries, interviews, newsreels, trailer, booklet

Reviewed by Philip Kemp

The tussle between neorealism and quasi-operatic melodrama that runs through so much of Visconti's work reaches its apogee in the near-on three hours of *Rocco and His Brothers*. A mother and four of her sons – Simone, Rocco, Ciro and Luca – arrive in Milan from Lucania in southern Italy to join the eldest son Vincenzo, who's already established there and engaged to Ginetta (Claudia Cardinale). Divided into five 'chapters', one for each son, the film dramatises a national preoccupation of the period: the gulf between the rural, traditional south and the urbanised north. Over the five acts, we see the family disintegrate, despite the efforts of the mother Rosaria (Katina Paxinou) and the saintly middle brother Rocco (Alain Delon), under the pressures of urban life. The most dramatic clash comes between Rocco and his older brother Simone (Renato Salvatori) over Nadia (Annie Girardot), the prostitute they both want.

Though acclaimed at Venice, *Rocco* won no prizes, apparently thanks to the vocal disapproval of four government ministers present at the event, who felt it brought their country into disrepute. It also hit censorship problems, and the city officials of Milan deplored its "inopportune resemblance to reality". That element now looks like its strongest suit.

If there's a prime weakness, it focuses on Delon; not only does Rocco seem too virtuous to be true, but the actor's refined good looks make him an unlikely peasant, and downright



Rocco and His Brothers The tussle between neorealism and quasi-operatic melodrama that runs through Visconti's work reaches its apogee here

Television

THE BORGIAS

Brian Farnham; UK 1981. BBC/2entertain/Region 2 DVD; Certificate 15; 530 minutes; 1.33:1

Reviewed by Robert Hanks

History has not been kind to the Borgias, for centuries the objects of wild accusations of poisoning, incest and simony (though public indignation over the last one peaked some time ago). History hasn't been much kinder to *The Borgias*. Evidently conceived in the shadow of the wildly successful *I, Claudius* (1976) – similar quantities of poisoning and incest, less simony – it misfired from the start: John Prebble and Ken Taylor's scripts slipped smoothly from the lurid to the woodenly over-informative, the acting was almost uniformly melodramatic (in the case of Adolfo Celi, who played the Borgia patriarch Rodrigo, an imperfectly penetrable Italian accent made it hard to be sure), and occasional filmed outings to handsome Italian locations contrasted unhelpfully with the cheapness and artificiality of the rest, shot on video in studio sets. Ridiculed by critics, the drama became a national joke. (Neil Jordan's stab – I use the word advisedly – at the same characters for the Showtime network from 2011-13 got mixed-to-positive reviews in the US, mixed-to-derisive in the UK: the difference may be explained in part by folk-memory, dictating that the Borgias are always ludicrous.)

A cooler viewing suggests that it wasn't as bad as all that – the first episode, in which Rodrigo schemed successfully to be elected Pope Alexander VI, set an awful tone, chucking the viewer *in medias res* while cramming in *Phantom Menace* levels of intrinsically dull political manoeuvring. But within three episodes the drama warms up, the characters take on, at least intermittently, more human characteristics; Oliver Cotton's one-note Cesare is a partial exception, an insufficiently inflected mix of sneering ruthlessness and Oedipal issues. And a vein of (intentional) silliness surfaces from time to time, most notably in Rodrigo's encounter with the invading French king Charles VIII – the pope in Father Christmas robes patronising Andrew Dunford's temperamental Charles, a slightly simple descendant of the Dauphin in *Henry V*. Students of art history can have fun spotting which renaissance portraits supplied the hairstyles and costumes. Still, if it's not as bad as all that, it's still pretty bad – a warning of the hazards of relying on the glamour of period which British drama producers still haven't heeded.

Disc: Occasional VHS snowflakes, but otherwise a clean transfer emphasises the gulf in quality between the film work and the video segments. No extras.

UNBREAKABLE KIMMY SCHMIDT

US 2015. Netflix/Universal Pictures/Region 2 DVD; Certificate 12; 311 minutes; 1.78:1

Reviewed by Robert Hanks

The high concept behind this comedy, a *succès d'estime* for Netflix last year, is that Kimmy (Ellie Kemper) has spent 10 years living in an underground bunker in Indiana, imprisoned with three other women by the Reverend Richard Wayne Gary Wayne (sic) in the belief that an apocalypse has destroyed the outside world: now she's come to New York City, to confront



Unbreakable Kimmy Schmidt When it sticks to the concept it is very good, the laughs heightened by notes of buried trauma, but several episodes just mark time

all its cynicism and materialism with a childlike optimism that the bunker either didn't allow her to grow out of or forced her to cling to. When it sticks to the concept it is very good, the laughs heightened by notes of buried trauma (Kimmy occasionally tries to strangle people in her sleep, makes passing references to weird sex stuff in the bunker). The episodes in which the Reverend (Jon Hamm, living up to his surname) goes on trial, are particularly good; and some of the incidental gags are excellent – Kimmy's gay aspiring-actor roommate Titus Andromedon (Tituss Burgess) goes to a straight coach to have the camp drilled out of him, in the hope of a regular spot on *Entourage 2*; Martin Short as a crazed cosmetic surgeon (echoes of his part in *Inherent Vice*), face so trussed up by botox he can't say his own name (spelled 'Grant', pronounced 'Frann'). But several of the 13 episodes mark time, and a lot of the shtick is familiar to fans of *30 Rock* (Tina Fey co-created this series): Kimmy's can-do naivety invokes the spirit of Kenneth the page.

Disc: Good transfer, no extras.

ROMANZO CRIMINALE – LA SERIE: SEASON 2

Stefano Sollima; Italy 2010. BBC/Arrow Films/Region 2 DVD; Certificate 18; 529 minutes; 1.78:1

Reviewed by Robert Hanks


Oh, those Romans. Like Michele Placido's 2005 film of the same name, this Italian series (shown on Sky in the UK) is taken from Giancarlo de Cataldo's novel about the rise and fall of a crime

syndicate, which was itself based on the real-life exploits of the Magliana gang – a bunch of low-level thugs who, in the 1970s, put aside rivalries to build a new criminal organisation, a Roman version of the Mafia or the Camorra. The first series revolved around the charismatic Libanese (Francesco Montanari), the one with the vision and the aggression to realise it: coke and paranoia drove him into a frenzy of overacting, so that his murder in the final episode came as something of a relief. This series begins with his friends coming together to avenge his death and argue about who will run the gang now: smart, honourable Freddo or sexy, unreliable Dandi? Meanwhile, a pair of mysterious political types crop up to offer advice or temptation, and to throw in references to real-life events (the P2 masonic lodge, the Bologna bombing that killed 85 people in 1980).

Despite their presence, it's clear that *Romanzo Criminale* lacks any wider political vision, any of David Simon's sense of how crime reflects society (or if it has one, it gets distracted by all the pointy collars and wafting flares); it doesn't even have Coppola's narrower interest in family dynamics – a closer parallel might be *Footballers' Wives*, another drama about a milieu shaped by money and machismo and short on taste. At worst it is shallow and repetitive (too many "Who says you're the boss?" and "You said you were going to quit" speeches) – but it's designed and shot beautifully, and acted with panache: hard not to be caught up.

Disc: Very good, crisp transfer. No extras. Ⓢ

New releases

 unconvincing as the champion boxer he becomes. In the genial, brutal Simone, however, Salvatori finds the role of his career, and Girardot gives the film's standout performance, vulnerable beneath her street-smart carapace.

Disc: A pristine 4K restoration, supervised by cinematographer Giuseppe Rotunno, with all the original's missing footage fully replaced. Two dialogue versions, Italian and French. The extras are identical to those included on Eureka's DVD release of 2008.

THE SOUTHERNER

Jean Renoir, USA 1945; Kino Lorber/Region A Blu-ray/Region 1 DVD; 92 minutes; 1.33:1; Features: Pare Lorentz's documentary 'The River', Renoir's 'A Salute to France' (1944)

Reviewed by Nick Pinkerton

Renoir's most perfect American film, which can also be counted among his greatest overall, *The Southerner* gets in close with a family of sharecroppers, the Tuckers, through the tribulations of a single year, their first working a rundown piece of farmland that they can (sort of) call their own. The passing of the seasons is marked by old-fashioned prints from the pages of a general-store calendar, a touch that, like much here, manages to be touching without verging on the cosy or quaint.

Renoir, who wrote movingly in his autobiography of an America of the imagination first encountered in bucolic Mack Sennett comedies, had visited the Deep South when shooting *Swamp Water* (1941) in Georgia's Okefenokee Swamp, and here he shows a better feeling for regional specificities than most native-born directors not named Ford. (Having the uncredited assistance of William Faulkner can't have hurt.)

Rangy Texan Zachary Scott, who would later work with Buñuel on *The Young One* (1960), stars as the Tucker patriarch, his amiable inflexibility anchoring varied scenes of knockabout comedy (a barroom brawl with husky city slicker Charles Kemper), rip-snortin' jubilation (a wedding line dance), tall-tale mythos (the capture of 'Lead-Pencil', an antediluvian leviathan of a catfish), Yoknapatawpha County gothics (J. Carrol Naish and simpleton Norman Lloyd's hillbilly neighbours) and biblical reckoning (a flood that threatens to undo a year of backbreaking labour).

There is a frank acquaintance with the facts of life here that's rare for a film of this or any period, as in the scene where Scott, with unmistakable amorous intent, discreetly puts down a makeshift divider between the bed where wife Betty Field awaits him in their one-room shack and the rest of the occupants, particularly Beulah Bondi's cursed old granny.

The lyrical, cracker-barrel realism of *The Southerner* would provide a beacon for future followers – Charles Burnett, for example, has spoken of the film's influence – but it remains in a class by itself, a pioneer piece of American neorealism.

Disc: Contextualising extras include Pare Lorentz's classic documentary on the ornery history of the Mississippi river, an inspiration to Renoir, and the latter's own 1944 *A Salute to France*, a wartime propaganda piece featuring Burgess Meredith and a rousing



The silent type: *Valentino*

montage that mixes garrotted Nazis with Resistance fighters facing the firing squad.

UNDERGROUND

Emir Kusturica; France/Germany/Hungary 1995; BFI/Region B Blu-ray/Region 2 DVD; Certificate 15; 161/167 minutes; 1.85:1; Features: 'Once upon a Time There Was a Country' (six-episode TV version of 'Underground'), 'Shooting Days' documentary, EPK items, essay booklet

Reviewed by Kate Stables

Possibly his best film, certainly his most significant, this tragicomic epic allegory about Yugoslavia's troubled 50-year trajectory simultaneously crowned and crippled Emir Kusturica's previously meteoric career. Despite receiving the Palme d'Or (his second, after *When Father Was Away on Business*), the film's perceived pro-Serbian stance prompted violent critical attacks, since the Balkan war it depicted was still raging. In recent years, however, it's been cautiously reassessed (this BFI release includes Dina Jordanova and Sean Homer's thoughtful re-readings of the film's ideology and its Fellini-esque imagination).

Filtering Yugoslav history through the love tangles and breathtaking betrayals woven between Miki Manojlovic and Lazar Ristovski's exuberant Belgrade profiteers, it's a brash, gypsy-band-fuelled carnival careering through WWII bombing, torture, abduction and fraudulent incarceration, emerging in both the Cold War and the hot one of the 1990s with a heady, blackly comic mix of satire and slapstick.

Tragedy replayed as farce (Kusturica's favourite mode), it has a thematic and visual audacity (communism as a cellar, a postmodern take on the 'red western', the float-away wedding party) that compensates for its hectic overload. It's fascinating, too, to track the circles that are its organising principle for both plot and visuals, as weddings, wars and monkeys emerge repeatedly from the seeming chaos. If Ristovski's exoticised and indestructible Balkan 'Wildman' feels blithely overdone, Manojlovic's master manipulator is a joy, never more so than when rolling in lechery and lies with Mirjana Jokovic's histrionic Natalija. Kusturica's take on cinema's unreliable narration of history winks at us from their row about a deceitful script: "No text, my dear, has any truth in it. The truth exists only in real life."

Disc: Both Blu-ray and DVD hi-def transfers cope well with the low-contrast interiors and Goran Bregovic's wildly capering score. The six-part TV miniseries is a considerable boon,

even if only to underscore the artistry of the film version. Aleksandar Manic's documentary provides valuable on-set insight, even if it's a bit breathless in its director-worship.

VALENTINO

Ken Russell; UK 1977; BFI/Region B Blu-ray and Region 2 DVD Dual Format; Certificate 18; 128 minutes; 1.85:1; Features: Tim Lucas commentary, Dudley Sutton interview, Rudolf Nureyev archive TV interview, Ken Russell 1987 Guardian Lecture audio, Lynn Seymour archive audio tribute to Nureyev, Valentino's funeral archive footage, trailers and stills collection


Reviewed by Trevor Johnston

Ken Russell obviously liked a good martyr. His filmography is packed with misunderstood composers, dancers and artists, all of whom suffer for daring to cut across the grain of their particular socio-historical moment. After sculptor Henri Gaudier-Brzeska, Gustav Mahler, Pete Townshend's innocent Tommy and Franz Liszt, ill-fated silent-screen icon Rudolph Valentino was the next victim in Russell's 1970s run of brightly hued phantasmagoria, here first seen inside his coffin – serene, pristine, dead at 31.

What follows is a kind of post-mortem, constructed from the differing perspectives of wives, would-be lovers and managers, each filling us in on the Rudy they knew. As such, it's soon apparent that the script (by Russell and *Raging Bull* writer Mardik Martin) doesn't have a particular view on the 'real' Valentino behind the celluloid legend, instead showing an individual repeatedly exploited by others seeking a fast track for their own ambitions. An intriguing conceit, certainly, and not too far from *Citizen Kane* territory after all, yet in practice the film feels restless, fragmented and somehow hollow in the middle, even if many of its components still impress.

Perhaps it needed an extraordinary central performance to hold everything together, and while ballet superstar Rudolf Nureyev's first acting role brings masculine beauty and sheer mystique to the proceedings, his Russian-accented line readings simply lack emotional credibility. Former pop star Michelle Phillips proves even less persuasive as his hysterically artsy second wife, so the film's pretty much dead on its feet by halfway, notwithstanding Shirley Russell's scintillating costumes and art director Philip Harrison turning Shepperton into jazz-age Hollywood.

It rallies, though, for a pugilistic finale (shot in the Blackpool Tower ballroom!) in which Valentino dons boxing gloves to defend his manhood, delivering a brilliantly staged, utterly passionate condemnation of homophobia and xenophobia. It's among the great set pieces of Russell's entire career – unfortunately lurking in one of his lesser achievements.

Disc: A clean, good-looking print shows off the glitter of a gilded age to striking effect, while the archive extras cover a broad swathe of interest for cineastes and balletomanes alike. The audio-only Ken Russell stage interview from 1987 is predictably forthright and gossipy (he calls *Valentino* "rubbish", by the way), though the real meat is in Tim Lucas's fact-packed and admirably opinionated feature commentary. A terrific presentation for a problematic movie. 

Lost and found

LOOKING FOR MR. GOODBAR

OVERLOOKED FILMS CURRENTLY UNAVAILABLE ON UK DVD OR BLU-RAY

A tale of sex and the city in the 1970s finds itself torn between female freedom and reactionary backlash

By Christina Newland

Looking for Mr. Goodbar (1977) is a film about women's lib that owes as much to Erica Jong as it does to received wisdom from the male establishment. It exists in a curious margin of late-1970s American cinema, a potent concoction of New Hollywood aesthetics and more dubiously old-fashioned attitudes. And while it maintains that women's sexual freedom may lead to dire consequences, it is also oddly open to female desire and subjectivity, suggesting a certain conflict at its centre.

Goodbar was adapted from the bestselling Judith Rossner novel of the same name, and both were based on real-life events – the death of Roseann Quinn, a New York teacher found brutally murdered by a casual lover in 1973. Stalwart studio director Richard Brooks (of *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* fame) cast Diane Keaton in the leading role, as well as soon-to-be stars Richard Gere and Tom Berenger in smaller parts.

Theresa Dunn (Keaton), aka Terry, is a kindly schoolteacher of deaf children by day, hailing from a bourgeois Irish-Catholic family. But Terry is also a shiftless, nocturnal creature, and after dark she prowls disco clubs and dive bars to meet men. She becomes thrill-seeking and sexually assertive, with a propensity for 'dangerous' types and a taste for Class A drugs. It's enjoyably frank, but you can sense that Brooks is going spoil the fun.

The film charts Terry's sexual conquests, from highly strung, knife-wielding stud Tony (Gere) to seemingly courteous social worker James (William Atherton). Terry has a prickly inability to go for an 'appropriate' man, driven by a stilted, antagonistic relationship with her rigid father. The patriarch is *Goodbar*'s apparent 'voice of reason', with a strident view on the "bra-burning brigade" he watches on television.

It's fair to say that Keaton made a dramatic transformation in 1977. *Annie Hall*'s April release solidified her star image as a wide-eyed, gawky Midwesterner, bookish and precocious. By the autumn of the same year, the low-key *Goodbar* saw a limited release. Here, she plays a born-and-bred New Yorker – a cynical man-eater, drug-taker and nightclubber. Annie Hall cries at a spider in the bathtub; Terry Dunn shrieks and laughs when she finds roaches crawling on her things.

Some felt Keaton was miscast, and it's true that there are few comparable roles in her career. But even as Brooks beats us over the head with slapdash psychoanalysis, trying to 'explain' Terry's promiscuity, she comes to life in Keaton's able hands. She's impulsive, quick-witted and bold – a fully fledged woman in spite of the director's



Bar flies: Richard Gere and Diane Keaton in *Looking for Mr. Goodbar*

Terry comes to life in Keaton's able hands. She's impulsive, quick-witted and bold – in spite of the director's moralising

one-note moralising. Terry's mattress-on-the-floor bohemian sensibility feels modern; her solo trips into busy Manhattan bars, armed with a book and a glass of wine, still make her seem more breezily confident than most. In fact, Terry is so swaggeringly likeable that the narrative seems to adopt her laissez-faire attitude towards life.

There are times when it feels as though *Goodbar* is offering a compelling revision of gender roles, only to later renege on its promises. Terry is completely autonomous, and has no desire to burden herself with serious romantic

entanglements. She openly pursues men, then cuts them off when she's satisfied.

Perhaps even more pressingly, the film expends an unusual amount of energy focusing on male attributes. In its many softly lit bedroom scenes, the visual emphasis is on its attractive male actors – fit torsos, bare backsides and supple lips. Three years later, Gere would have a similar pin-up role in *American Gigolo* – another film that foregrounds the female gaze.

Brooks employs a roaming, free-wheeling camera, hallucinogenic strobe-light effects and, strikingly, a disco-heavy soundtrack, which instantly offers a louche, hedonistic feel – and *Goodbar* is sure to include the joyous, sex-positive femininity of Donna Summer and Thelma Houston. Perhaps all of these choices are carefully calculated to flatter a young audience circa '77, but the narrative really seems to take unbridled delight in Terry's own pleasure; it feels as if it's *on her side*. This unravels in the brutal finale, when Terry's fate finally mirrors Roseann Quinn's. The 'cautionary' aspects of the story suddenly seem harrowingly evident – and deeply regressive.

Subject matter notwithstanding, it's uncertain why *Looking for Mr. Goodbar* has become one of the rare birds of 1970s American cinema. The film's unavailability on DVD in both Britain and America has led to whispering. Rumours about its absence vary from the plausible (music rights) to the outlandish (Hershey didn't like the naming of its chocolate bar in the title). Poor-quality VHS seems to be the next-best option.

It'd be wrong to suggest that *Looking for Mr. Goodbar* is an easy watch, but it's nonetheless worthwhile. In spite of its excesses, there seems to be a pitched internal battle for the film's soul throughout. The no man's land between unruly female defiance and reactionary backlash is a peculiar place for *Looking for Mr. Goodbar* to land – but it's a revealing one. **S**

WHAT THE PAPERS SAID



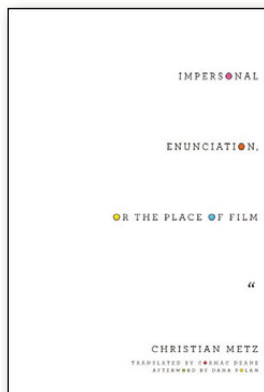
'Keaton is everything the rest of this movie is not: provocative, affecting, scary. She creates a heroine who is at once sexual aggressor and victim, lady and tramp, and she relentlessly savages most pat

notions about the nature of womanhood.'

Frank Rich 'Time', October 1977

'Keaton's performance and the character are fully realised, even in this movie that finds room for so many loose ends and dead ends.'

Roger Ebert January 1977



Impersonal Enunciation, or the Place of Film

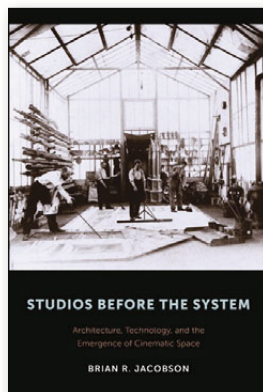
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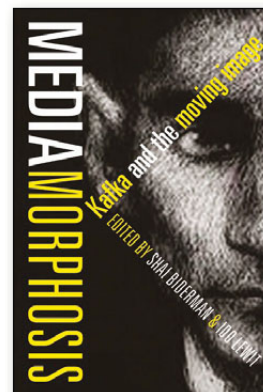
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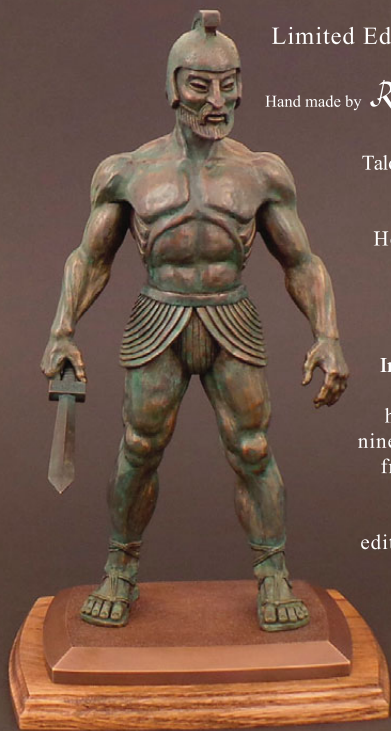
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River's edge: Terrence Malick issuing instructions to the crew during the filming of *Badlands* in 1972, starring Martin Sheen (far right)

'A PUREE OF ADULATION'

TERRENCE MALICK

Rehearsing the Unexpected

Edited by Carlo Hintermann and Daniele Villa, Faber & Faber, 432pp, £25, ISBN 9780571234561

Reviewed by Ryan Gilbey

Cinema audiences have learned to spot signs of partiality in the credit roll. A movie which counts among its producers the former N.W.A. members Ice Cube and Dr. Dre, as last year's *Straight Outta Compton* did, is unlikely to render impartially the story of that hip-hop group. A documentary about Ayrton Senna made with the co-operation of the late racing driver's family and the Ayrton Senna Institute, as Asif Kapadia's *Senna* (2010) was, could never be described as warts and all.

The heart cannot help but sink, then, at the second line on the first page of *Terrence Malick*:

Rehearsing the Unexpected, in which the editors Carlo Hintermann and Daniele Villa thank their subject and his wife Alexandra 'Ecky' Malick. Their insistence that the director was "not involved in the creation of the book" is at best naive. The editors themselves, who made the woolly documentary *Rosy-Fingered Dawn: A Film on Terrence Malick* (2002), have worked with him as line producers for the Italian unit of *The Tree of Life* (2010) and in an unspecified capacity ("to lend a hand when needed") on *To the Wonder* (2012). Malick's implicit blessing has facilitated extensive interviews with collaborators, including the production designer Jack Fisk, producer Edward Pressman and actors such as Sissy Spacek, Sean Penn and Jessica Chastain. The book makes no claims to be a biography (it is structured chronologically in the 'oral history' style), but there must still be a middle ground between that rigorous form and this trumped-up fanzine.

Curious details predominate in the early pages. We learn that Malick played Malvolio in *Twelfth Night* while at Harvard and that he served as a stunt driver on his own 1973 debut, *Badlands*. There is interesting material on friends and mentors, including director Irvin Kershner and the *New Yorker* editor William Shawn, and on Malick's work with Kershner on an early version of *Dirty Harry* (1971), which was to have starred Marlon Brando as an aspirant cop who is rejected by the police but pursues criminals all the same.

Discussions of the lengthy editing process of *Badlands* and *Days of Heaven* (1978), and the revolutionary use of voiceover to complicate the images (rather than elucidating them in the conventional manner), keep the book on track for a while. The editor Billy Weber discloses that a single shot in *Days of Heaven* took two years to cut, and reveals the origins of some of that film's 11th-hour narration by the young newcomer

Linda Manz. Her apocalyptic reverie (“There’s gonna be creatures running every which way, some of them burned, half their wings burning...””) was the result of having had the Book of Revelation read to her by a babysitter the night before going into the studio to finish recording. Malick tried to get her to read the voiceover as written, but all she wanted to do was paraphrase what she had heard. Seeing excerpts of Manz’s dialogue spaced out on the page in poem form also provides some intermittent pleasure here.

The book’s problems begin after the mysterious chasm between that picture and *The Thin Red Line* 20 years later – a break that is covered here in four measly pages. (That’s one page less than *Dirty Harry* gets.) The drift toward the non-verbal in *Days of Heaven* is solidified by his approach on this comeback movie, his masterpiece, where he takes to shooting each scene in two ways – first with dialogue, and then without, with the cast navigating the emotions and choreography of a scene but not the words. The actor John C. Reilly, part of the ensemble cast of *The Thin Red Line*, told me in 2010 that he had delivered a three-page monologue only for Malick to say: “You know, John, I’m always slightly disappointed when y’all open your mouths to speak. I almost wish the movie could play like a silent picture.” It’s hard not to feel the same way about the book, which dissolves around this point into a purée of adulation.

It would help if there was some grit or fibre in there, but any opportunities for controversy

Malick worked with director Irvin Kershner on an early version of ‘Dirty Harry’, which was due to star Marlon Brando

are strenuously avoided. Pity poor Adrien Brody, who has to face the double indignity of being glossed over (he merits four passing mentions) after having already been virtually expunged from *The Thin Red Line*. Brody was cast in the lead role only to find that his contribution was reduced to a few plaintive close-ups. If the editors of this book didn’t contact him for quotes, it can only be because they didn’t want to rock the boat. A working relationship with the world’s most reclusive film director doesn’t come along every day. It has to be nurtured and caressed.

Still, at least they found room to weave in some inessential words from Richard Gere taken from a 2007 DVD commentary track, as well as an endless stream of facile observations. “Terry has always loved gates,” reveals Fisk. The cameraman Joerg Widmer advises us that *The Tree of Life* is “a movie about light and about wind, and about curtains in the wind”. (Nothing, sadly, on Malick’s widely confirmed love of *Zoolander*.) One can only give thanks that the book ends before *To the Wonder and Knight of Cups* (2015), thereby sparing the reader attempts by editors and interviewees alike to pretend that those films represent anything other than a bonfire of talent. ☹

DELIVERING DREAMS

A Century of British Film Distribution

By Geoffrey Macnab, I.B. Tauris, 272pp, £16.99, ISBN 9781784534899

Reviewed by Trevor Johnston

Those perceived as percentage-pocketing middle men rarely get much love or respect. Film distributors don’t make the movies, and they’re generally not the exhibitors who show the product either, so what are they doing to warrant their slice of the entertainment revenue pie? Given that their representative organisation in the UK, the Film Distributors’ Association, celebrated its centenary last year, they must be performing some worthwhile service, and Geoffrey Macnab’s thoroughly researched account of those 100 years wisely begins by explaining the workings of their particular part of the industry. The same underlying principles apply in today’s environment of blanket multiplex releases and digital projection as they did in the era of Chaplin and Griffith, since it’s the distributors’ close relationship with the market that determines which films the public gets to see, and when and where they get to see them. The distributors’ publicity machines position and brand everything from Hollywood tentpoles to arthouse esoterica, then their well-oiled delivery networks place the content on the screens where it belongs.

There’s a convincing case then for the distributors calling on a skill-set which producers and exhibitors don’t necessarily possess, and yet what emerges from this fascinating and endlessly entertaining study, is that amid the myriad technological and social changes since 1915, certain tensions have stayed constant at the heart of the business. For one thing, the fact that distributors claim a percentage of the cinemas’ take for each film has generated a historical mistrust that the exhibitors aren’t being wholly transparent with their figures. Computerised ticketing has to some extent put the issue to rest, but we’re not so many years away from the era when distributors hired a network of ‘secret shoppers’ whose job entailed counting audience members at individual screenings, then returning the data to see if it tallied with the numbers submitted by the exhibitors themselves. It was a task, we’re told, which involved multiple changes of clothing to avoid raising suspicion in the course of serial visits to the same site.

Macnab’s chronological approach, with chapter headings handily named after key homegrown films of each period, from Hitchcock’s *Blackmail* (1929) through to *The King’s Speech* (2010), provides a splendidly cogent breakdown of the particular problems

Film distributors don’t make the movies, and they’re often not the exhibitors who show the product either – so what are they doing?



Talk of the town: *The King’s Speech*

facing distributors at different historical moments, such as the challenge of the coming of sound, testing conditions under World War II bombardments, and the regeneration provided by out-of-town multiplexes after the industry’s 70s nadir. Common threads, however, include the sense that distribution seems to exist in a permanent state of anxiety as one crisis follows another – at present, for instance, it’s how the inexorable rise of video on demand will impact on cinema audiences – and indeed the basic structural issue facing British cinema as a whole. Since financial returns from a UK cinema run are less than likely to cover a film’s production cost, the result has been an ongoing reliance on US coin, which, as Macnab clearly lays out, has funded many a self-styled ‘British’ triumph, from Alexander Korda’s *The Private Life of Henry VIII* (1933) up to and beyond *The Full Monty* (1997).

Understandably, as the book’s focus moves towards the modern era, there’s more input from the personalities involved, including Will Clarke’s reminiscences about the early days of Optimum Releasing, whose canny blend of acquisitional nous and embrace of the DVD market alongside theatrical channels took them from optimistic start-up to major player in the first decade of the 2000s. What’s telling though, is how Macnab’s journalistic eye for illuminating detail brings to life the earlier chapters as well, whether he’s painting a vivid picture of the Wild West that was distribution circa 1915, when almost 7,000 new films were released and the Kinematograph Renters’ Society (now the FDA) came into being, or taking us on the road with a distributor’s rep in the early 1950s when contracts had to be signed with individual, often eccentric local exhibitors, prompting a forest of paperwork and an incessant traffic of vans transporting reels of celluloid.

It’s worth mentioning that the book was commissioned by the FDA, but its tone is never unduly deferential, instead delivering what amounts to a compact, lucid and hugely readable survey of the last century of film in Britain. It shows how distribution – rarely heralded, often decried – has been a vital cog in the cinematic machine, prone to the odd cough and splutter, yet remaining an essential facilitator of both cherished moviegoing memories and indeed viewing experiences yet to come. ☹

SILENT WOMEN

Pioneers of Cinema

Edited by Melody Bridges and Cheryl Robson, Supernova Books, 311pp, £14.99, ISBN 9780956632999

Reviewed by Pamela Hutchinson

Aged 30, former scriptwriter and editor Dorothy Arzner directed her first film. It was 1927 and Arzner was the only female director at Paramount, a fact she did not want to exploit. Accordingly, she demanded that her credit on *Fashions for Women* was no bigger than the studio's name. "I wanted to have my picture stand up along with the men's pictures and be box-office successes without any idea that a woman had made it," she explained to the film historian Kevin Brownlow 50 years later. "Just let the picture stand on its own."

That previously unpublished interview, possibly the last Arzner gave before she died in 1979, is one of the highlights of a new book on early female filmmakers, *Silent Women: Pioneers of Cinema*. Arzner's concern that her status as a "woman director" would be considered rare and remarkable was proved valid. Although she went on to a successful career directing films into the 1940s, she would have few female peers in Hollywood. Universal, for example, which in the 1910s had several female directors on its books, credited not a single woman as director between the coming of sound and 1982, when Amy Heckerling made *Fast Times at Ridgemont High*. And those long decades in between, when female filmmakers were an anomaly, have blinded us to the truth: that in the silent era women worked at all levels of the industry, in greater numbers, proportionally, than they do today.

This book gallops across silent film history, extracting names long known only to aficionados and building up a retrospective network of female talent. The title has a double meaning, referring not just to the silence of the films, but to film history's silence on this subject.

Each chapter tackles the era thematically – Aimee Dixon Anthony investigates early African-American filmmakers (she finds "approximately eight"); Shelley Stamp writes on women's creation of film culture, from journalism to education and reform movements; Ellen Cheshire looks at cinematographers; Tania Field surveys the history of women as film editors; Patricia Di Risio



Paramount importance: an interview with director Dorothy Arzner is one of the book's highlights

uncovers the breadth of topics covered by female scriptwriters; Julie K. Allen offers a special focus on Europe. There are also potted biographies of female stars of the era and an overview of silent female directors beginning with Alice Guy-Blaché.

Silent Women, in uncovering a diverse range of female voices from the past, offers a variety of present voices, with chapters ranging from the rigorously historical to the informal or rhetorically dramatic (see K. Charlie Oughton's

Universal credited not a single woman as director between the coming of sound and 1982's 'Fast Times at Ridgemont High'

advocacy of women's contributions to early horror cinema). The collection opens with documentarian Karen Day's very personal account of researching the adventurous actress-turned-filmmaker Nell Shipman ("How utterly cool was this woman?"). *Silent Women* is very much a book of the present moment, with several contributors admitting surprise at their discoveries, and repeated calls for the reader to go and learn more, either via new research or logging on to the Women Film Pioneers Project website. It concludes with a chapter from filmmaker Maria Giese on the institutionalised sexism and racism within modern Hollywood and her part in the growing campaign for equality. On this evidence, the relative diversity of the industry's past should shame it into taking action about its future. **S**

MISSING REELS: A NOVEL

By Farran Smith Nehme, Overlook Press, 352pp, \$26.95, ISBN 9781468309270

Reviewed by Craig Williams

Perfectly pitched between reverence and reflection, *Missing Reels*, the terrific debut novel from critic and celebrated classical Hollywood blogger Farran Smith Nehme, is a fleet-footed screwball comedy, charting the travails of a young woman from Mississippi as she negotiates the cinephile world of New York City in the late 1980s, falling in love and searching for a lost silent film. It is at once a romance and a detective story, with Nehme faithfully appropriating the structural ingenuity and verbal patter of the screwball comedies of the 1930s, while using the

sleuthing narrative as a platform to reflect on the legacy of the studio era in the modern world.

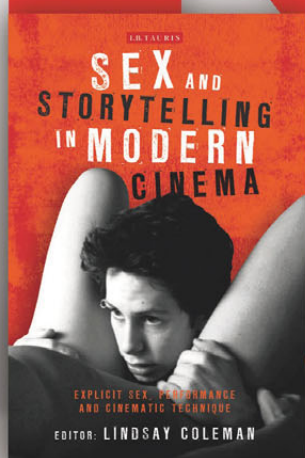
Much of *Missing Reels* deals with reconciling the celluloid dream with its more capricious reality. Plucky and adept at rhetorical sparring, protagonist Ceinwen Reilly is a classic screwball heroine, but she is a woman out of time. Nehme turns this incongruity into a virtue, mining comic riches from the dichotomy between the rarefied stylings of classical Hollywood and urban life in the 80s: "Frantically she tried to think of a good line from a movie, but none of her favourites

Nehme mines comic riches from the dichotomy between the rarefied stylings of classical Hollywood and 80s urban life

had a scene where the heroine woke up with a naked man in her bed. Damn you, Hays Office."

Beyond the adroitly deployed references to the brilliance of Leo McCarey or the intricacies of dressing like Jean Harlow, what truly resonates in *Missing Reels* is Nehme's ability to reflect on the self-mythologising zeal of its subject. Like Eleanor Henderson's *Ten Thousand Saints* or Rachel Kushner's *The Flamethrowers*, it is in essence a novel about the ephemeral notion of a golden age in one of Manhattan's bygone subcultures. While Ceinwen romanticises Hollywood's studio era, Nehme eulogises the city's repertory house scene in the 1980s. In the afterword, she quotes director Raoul Walsh's response to a question about the veracity of his portrayal of New York in *The Strawberry Blonde* (1941). "It's the way I want to remember it," he said. In *Missing Reels*, that applies to the movies, the scene and the city. **S**

Read



SEX AND STORYTELLING IN MODERN CINEMA

Explicit Sex, Performance and Cinematic Technique

Edited by Lindsay Coleman, I.B. Tauris, 272pp, paperback, £16.99, ISBN 9781780766409

Explicit full-frontal nudity and unsimulated sex feature increasingly in films, giving rise to critical consternation and accusations that such film narratives are pornographic. This book explores how sex can be an essential element of cinematic storytelling today. Offering detailed analysis of how choices are made in the presentation of explicit sex in controversial films, such as *Shame*, *Baise-moi*, *Antichrist*, *Dogtooth* and *Lust*, *Caution*, the expert contributors show how sexual content can aid characterisation, highlight themes, and develop plot. The impact of explicit sex as an element of a film's narrative can be assisted by effective, nuanced performances and incisive directorial technique. This book details, through the fundamentals of cinema, how explicit sex can be an essential component of a dramatically powerful narrative.

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LOVE: A BFI COMPENDIUM

Edited by James Bell, BFI, 160pp, paperback, illustrated, £16.99, ISBN 9781844579365

Since the birth of cinema, stories of love and romance have been its beating heart. From romantic epics to screwball comedy, Bollywood musicals to dark tales of obsession and desire, explore cinema's love affair with love in the fifth book of the BFI's unique Compendium series. With contributions from many leading film critics and writers, including Molly Haskell, David Thomson, Mark Cousins, Hannah McGill, Pamela Hutchinson, J. Hoberman, Neil Brand, Dan Callahan, Guy Lodge, Imogen Sara Smith, Tim Robey, Geoff Andrew, Rachel Dwyer, Ashley Clark and many more.

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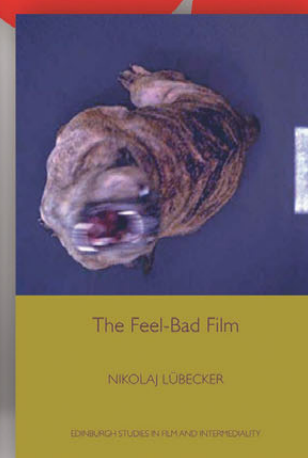


SLOW CINEMA

Edited by Tiago de Luca and Nuno Barradas Jorge, Edinburgh University Press, 352pp, paperback, £24.99, ISBN 9780748696048

Deploying the concept of slowness as an umbrella category under which filmmakers and traditions from different historical and geographical backgrounds can fruitfully converge, this innovative collection of essays interrogates and expands the frameworks that have generally informed slow cinema debates. Repositioning the term in a broader theoretical space, the book combines an array of fine-grained studies that provide valuable insight into the notion of slowness in the cinema, while mapping out past and contemporary slow films across the globe. *Slow Cinema* includes detailed studies of films by directors including Béla Tarr, Tsai Ming-liang, Lav Diaz, Kelly Reichardt and Lisandro Alonso, among others.

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THE FEEL-BAD FILM

By Nikolaj Lübecker, Edinburgh University Press, 200pp, paperback, illustrated, £24.99, ISBN 9780748697991

In recent years some of the most innovative European and American art film directors have made films that place the spectator in a position of intense discomfort. Systematically manipulating the viewer, sometimes by withholding information, sometimes through shock or seduction, these films have often been criticised as amoral, nihilistic or politically irresponsible. Analysing films by directors such as Lars von Trier, Gus Van Sant, Claire Denis and Michael Haneke, this book explores why we are attracted to these unpleasurable viewing experiences, what directors believe they can achieve via the feel-bad experience and how we can situate the films in intellectual history.

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GOOD AS GOLD

The annual Obituaries round-up (S&S, March) is an invaluable memorial to cinematic talent, but I am often saddened to come across the names of people whose contributions to cinema have been insufficiently recognised in film journals. Two names sprang out this year: Jack Gold and John Guillermin – two accomplished, versatile directors who never quite fitted in to any critical fashion or movement, but who nevertheless did some really interesting work. Their careers have a lot to tell us about the vagaries of the British film industry; I hope a future issue of S&S might reflect on their distinctive and distinguished contributions.

Neil Sinyard North Lincolnshire

ALL IT'S CRACKED UP TO BE

It was a pleasure to see Michael Brooke's insightful review of the 40th anniversary edition of *Thundercrack!* ('Filth and wisdom', Home Cinema, S&S, March) begin with a mention of London's Scala Cinema in King's Cross. Working there as an usher/cashier from 1980-87 I saw Curt McDowell's trash masterpiece many times. What places the film above genre tropes is how often it tries to punch above its weight. Yes, there is gay and straight hardcore sex, an old-dark-house setting and suitably wiggled-out characters, but the film boasts a dense script by the wonderful George Kuchar, much humour, a rollicking piano score and a cast who play it to the hilt. The 'chiaroscuro' camerawork (it was shot for tuppence) has *noir* pretensions and the odd optical effect adds to the overall surrealism. It's outlandish and lurid and at times panders to extremes, but I'm happy that the film has finally seen the light of day in an exemplary edition.

Pete Moore Brighton

GOODBYE TO LANGUAGE?

I enjoyed the discussion of foreign-language film in the UK (Editorial and Letters, S&S, March). For many reasons, the current climate gives cause for concern. The saturation by mainstream films of 'independent' cinemas seems to have led many to conclude that it is inevitable and acceptable for foreign-language cinema and other 'specialised' types of film to bypass a theatrical release and appear only on video on demand. But it isn't.

As Mark Cosgrove pointed out in his letter, there are initiatives and networks working to give audiences the chance to see foreign-language film on cinema screens: the recent commercial success of titles such as *The Assassin* and *Rams* shows their value. *Timbuktu* was also profitable, and actually enjoyed a long theatrical run in many UK screens.

VOD and other delivery systems help to ensure diversity and genuine access. But to believe that theatrical releasing has no part to play is misguided, on both cultural and economic grounds. Let's not accept that foreign-language cinema is extinct as a theatrical entity, but unite to ensure that it isn't.

Jason Wood artistic director: film, HOME Manchester

LETTER OF THE MONTH SEASON OF THE HITCH



With reference to Henry K. Miller's article ('Papa du cinéma', S&S, March) on *Hitchcock/Truffaut* (above), it is worth noting that even relatively sympathetic reviewers described the original interviews as dry and overly technical – though as film historian Janet Bergstrom has pointed out, much is lost in translation, particularly Hitchcock's understated humour.

This has had the effect of masking the emotional drive central to the project for both men. It was not just about, as some would have it, making better cinema.

Truffaut was at that time contemplating abandoning film production. He had had two commercial failures in a row – *Shoot the Pianist* and *The Soft Skin*, though the former would go on to achieve something of a cult status – and film writers he had savaged during his earlier career as a critic lost no time in making reprisals. He later expressed regret for his angry critical style.

Truffaut had initially accepted André Bazin's assessment of Hitchcock as a con man, but was gradually won over by Chabrol and Rohmer, who saw emotional substance. The difficulty these two writers faced was that their response was largely instinctual. They saw Hitchcock's characters, particularly women, making moral choices based not on rationality but emotion. Why? Because as

Hitchcock revealed in a 1973 interview, we are thankfully ignorant of what the future holds for us. If preventing an assassination may cost your son's life (the dilemma of *The Man Who Knew Too Much*, 1955), only your emotions can guide you to the best choice.

Chabrol and Rohmer's attempts to conceptualise this were forced. But while Hitchcock was suspicious of their intellectual flights of fancy, he embraced the notion of himself as a Catholic artist. He could not speak of his faith, however: it is central to Jesuit teaching that this is a private matter between you and your maker. Blind to this, Bazin misunderstood Hitchcock's preoccupation with the way class and gender discrimination delimits life options as predestination – hence his belief that Hitchcock was a Jansenist "even if he does not know it".

Hitchcock was in tears, he told Truffaut, when he received his letter proposing the project. He had assumed that he would go through his career perceived as "synthetically entertaining", as Lindsay Anderson had described his American films, and nothing more. What Truffaut wanted to know was, how do you survive and keep producing with such a barrage of critical dismissal?

Stephane Duckett, author of *Hitchcock in Context*, London

RIFFING YARN

I was intrigued enough by Paolo Sorrentino's *Youth* to dig out Philip Kemp's review (S&S, February), and was perplexed by a passing reference to a hotel guest as "a mountainously fat man". This is clearly meant to be Diego Maradona – hence Paul Dano's character, Jimmy Tree, tells him: "The whole world knows you're left-handed." In a film which has three ageing acting greats (Michael Caine, Harvey Keitel and Jane Fonda) riffing on their legacies and a real-life pop star (Paloma Faith) playing herself, it is odd not to mention this third element of the playful conceit: a relatively unknown actor playing a traffic-stopping cultural icon, though with a

Karl Marx tattoo on his back instead of the Che Guevara the real Maradona has on his arm.

Kemp does not mention Dano, but isn't Jimmy Tree's late realisation that humans are driven mostly by horror or desire the key to some of what has happened? And isn't Sorrentino proposing this observation as the elusive deathbed pay-off line for the script Keitel is trying so hard to finish?

Barry Didcock Edinburgh

Additions and corrections

March p.80 *King Jack*, 15, 80m 35s; p.80 *Mavis*, PG, 80m 33s; p.84 *The Propaganda Game*, 15, 97m 50s; p.86 *The Survivalist*, 18, 103m 32s; p.88 *Time out of Mind*, 15, 121m 19s; p.90 *Truth*, 15, 125m 27s; p.92 *Welcome to Leith*, 15, 86m 25s February p.56 Isabella Rossellini didn't sing 'Mysteries of Love' in *Blue Velvet* – the song was played only on the soundtrack and was sung by Julie Cruise.

MCCABE & MRS. MILLER



Silence, snow and smoke from an opium pipe frame the death of Warren Beatty's gambler in Robert Altman's anti-western

By Tom Charity

Like so many westerns, *McCabe & Mrs. Miller* (1971) begins with a stranger riding into town. In this case, though, the film fails to complete the anticipated rhyme. McCabe won't be leaving town at the end – not physically, anyhow. “There is only one true ending: death,” Robert Altman observed. “Anything else is bullshit.”

At the time, Altman was known only for the anarchic hipster comedy *MASH* (1969) and his hippie allegory *Brewster McCloud* (1970) – a favourite of singer-songwriter Leonard Cohen as it turned out. It might have seemed perverse of Altman to turn next to the most classical and conservative of genres, but Peckinpah and Leone had prepared the ground for the anti-western, and Altman seized the opportunity to undermine the mythic authority of the American cowboy. John ‘Pudgy’ McCabe is the archetypal gunfighter looking to get out from under his reputation. But he's a sorry kind of a hero. Played by Warren Beatty in a shaggy bearskin coat, a suit and a bowler hat, he's one of Altman's rueful mumbler – like Marlowe and Popeye – misunderstood muddlers muttering asides into their sleeves. “I've got poetry in me,” he attests – though no one is there to hear it.

Arriving in the upstart north-western mining town of Presbyterian Church, McCabe is a gambler who sees a chance to establish a brothel – but he shows no head for business, and he's plainly out

of his depth when a big mining corporation sends in negotiators to secure its stranglehold on the local economy. Overestimating his worth, McCabe inadvertently seals his own death warrant.

In Edmund Naughton's 1959 novel *McCabe*, seven of the 18 chapters take place during the final gunfight. In Altman's film, it lasts about 20 minutes. Snow is falling (serendipitously by all accounts, a gift from the heavens, and the icing on the production's cake). In a famously murky movie – director of photography Vilmos Zsigmond flashed the film to produce an earthy look reminiscent of Van Gogh's *Potato Eaters* – the snow casts a glare over the last act. As importantly, it muffles the sound, bringing a hushed solemnity to the proceedings. For nearly 15 minutes there's almost no dialogue, and no music until the last frames, when Altman will return to the film's de facto Greek chorus, Leonard Cohen, for his gentle lament ‘Winter Lady’.

The western shootout is traditionally where justice and might coalesce in symbolic affirmation of Manifest Destiny. Even when he's outnumbered, the hero is almost never outgunned. Faced with three professional gunmen, McCabe doesn't acquit himself well. Refusing the ritualistic duel, he scrambles to the still unfinished church for a higher vantage point but haplessly forfeits his shotgun to the outraged minister, fatally diminishing his chances of survival. He scurries from one hiding place to

At least since ‘Bonnie and Clyde’ in 1967 a last-reel demise was de rigueur for this era’s martyred icons

another. He cowers behind storefronts and shoots two of his adversaries in the back... He gets the jump on the third by playing dead, only moments before crumpling into the snow himself.

If the outline smacks of counter-cultural point-scoring (and at least since *Bonnie and Clyde* in 1967 a last-reel demise was *de rigueur* for this era's martyred icons), the sequence transcends any political posturing through Altman's characteristically unruly grace. Take the simple but resonant cross-currents he establishes by cutting between McCabe's desperate flight and the townsfolk, banding together to put out the blaze in the empty church, collective action that will end in triumph and jubilation just as McCabe meets his sad, solitary demise. See, too, the way the pursuit takes us on a circuit through the deserted back alleys of the clapboard town we've witnessed being constructed over the course of the movie (take a bow, production designer Leon Ericksen and his team of carpenter-extras)... Best of all, the poetic, beautifully measured, plaintive movement away from McCabe, buried outside in the freezing snow, to his savvy business partner and lover Mrs Miller (Julie Christie) bringing a pipe to her lips in the warm glow of an opium den, losing herself in the abstraction of the smoke.

Apt that this retreat from cruel reality should echo the overhead shot of Jill (Claudia Cardinale) in her bed towards the end of Leone's *Once upon a Time in the West* (1968), even as it foreshadows Noodles's (De Niro's) opiate refuge at the end of *Once upon a Time in America* (1983): Leone's films, like *McCabe*, mourn a certain kind of American innocence and independence, inextricably wrapped up in the movie myths these filmmakers grew up on, and which unravelled before our eyes some time toward the end of the 1960s. **S**

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WHY NOT PRODUCTIONS AND PAGE 114 PRESENT

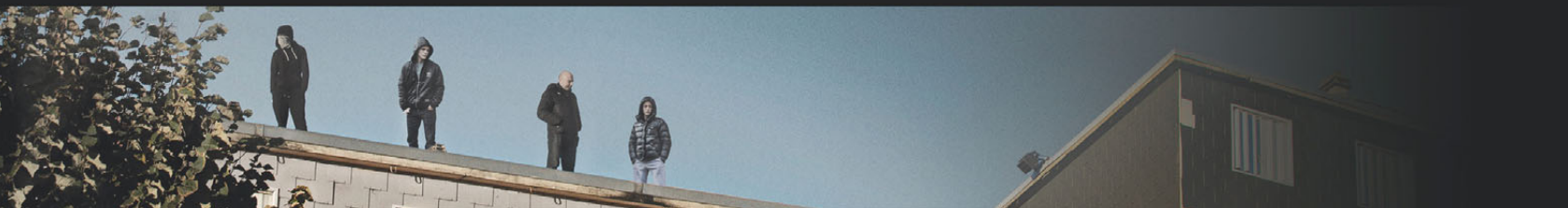
FROM JACQUES AUDIARD, DIRECTOR OF
'A PROPHET' AND 'RUST & BONE'



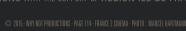
PALME D'OR WINNER 2015



D H E E P A N



DHEEPAN A FILM BY JACQUES AUDIARD WITH ANTONYTHASAN, JESUTHASAN, KALIEASWARI SRINIVASAN, VINCENT ROTTHERS, CLAUDE VINASITHAMBY, MARC ZINGA, JOSÉPHINE DE MEAUX, FRANCK FALISE, BASSI OHEM, FADOUZI BENSÂÏDI, TASSADIT MANDI
SCREENPLAY: NDIÉ DEBRÉ, THOMAS BIDECAIN, JACQUES AUDIARD. CINÉMATOGRAPHY: ÉPONINE MOMMENCEAU. EDITING: JULIETTE WELFUNG. ORIGINAL MUSIC: NICOLAS JAAR. PRODUCTION DESIGNER: MICHEL BARTHÉLÉMY (A.D.C.). ARTISTIC COLLABORATION: HÉLÈNE KLOTZ. COSTUMES: CHATTOUNE
SHINOBU DANIEL SOBRINO, VALÉRIE DELOOF, CYRIL HOLTZ. CASTING: PHILIPPE ELKOUBI, MOHAMED BELHAMAR. SCRIPT: NATHALIE VIERNY. 1ST ASSISTANT DIRECTOR: JEAN-BAPTISTE POUILLON. ASSOCIATE PRODUCER: MARTINE CASSINELLI. A WHY NOT PRODUCTIONS, PAGE 114, FRANCE 2 CINÉMA, CO PRODUCTION
WITH THE PARTICIPATION OF CANAL + CINÉ + FRANCE TÉLÉVISIONS WITH THE SUPPORT OF RÉGION ÎLE-DE-FRANCE IN ASSOCIATION WITH CINÉMA 8 A PLUS IMAGE 5 PALATINE ÉTOILE 12 INDÉFILMS 3 LA BANQUE POSTALE IMAGE 8 COFINOVA 11 SOFTVINCÉ 2 SOFCINÉMA 11



IN CINEMAS APRIL 8